# CHILDREN
# *of*
# FATE

MARICE RUTLEDGE

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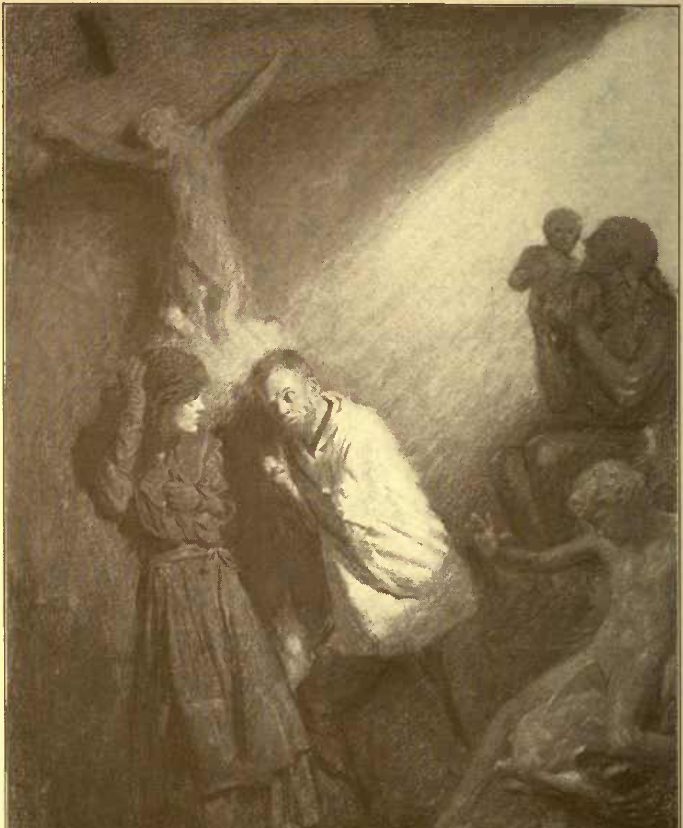
Mary from Eliza.

December - 1918.

# CHILDREN OF FATE



" 'He put his shoulder to the figure of Christ and pushed... I saw it topple and crash down.' "—*Page 157*

# CHILDREN OF FATE

BY

MARICE RUTLEDGE

*WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY*
*J. HENRY*

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TO

THE WISER WOMEN OF ALL COUNTRIES—

FORE-RUNNERS OF UNIVERSAL

PEACE

2138105

# CHILDREN OF FATE

## I

JEAN BOURDON, the father, folded his napkin and rose slowly from the round table. Obeying his signal, the family shifted in their places, hesitant, as if reluctant to break the circle. And in the big dining room, where the furniture seemed to have sprouted from the floor in massive familiar shapes, these men and women of several generations fitted into the space like plants that have grown in the same climate for years.

The air was charged with the heat of midday, mingled with reminiscent odors. The table was covered with the remains of a plentiful meal. But there was never any waste in the Bourdon family. Such as was left of wine, cheese and fruit had the conservative look of provisions still to be reckoned with. And Grandmother Bourdon's bottle of tonic stood guard over an untouched chunk of bread, as if assuring the company that, in this household, bread was respected.

"Come, . . . come, my children," said Jean Bourdon in a loud reassuring voice. "They will see this time what good Frenchmen can do! Ah, my friends, what they will get . . . !" The accompanying gesture was significant.

He was a plump little man, shaped like a bell. His voice boomed above the murmur of resumed conversation. "We will see that!" and he brought his hand down with a jovial slap on the shoulder of his eldest son. "Eh, Raymond?"

The women flocked ahead, Grandmother Bourdon leading the way. She was very old. She looked like a wizened leaf, held to the robust tree by a thin sappy thread. She walked leaning on a cane, and she blocked the door for a measurable time, wavering on the threshold, her head with its black-beaded cap nodding the uneven rhythms of age.

Her daughter-in-law, next in place, offered an arm. But the old lady refused any help.

"Leave me, . . . leave me," she quavered, with a gesture of impatience. "I am still valiant."

Jean Bourdon, surrounded by his sons and relatives, moved solidly through the door. The faces of the men, with the exception of Pierre, the youngest son, were flushed and damp. Jean Bourdon's round face emerged from a bushy growth of mustache and beard like an overripe fruit. He wore with authority a red ribbon in his buttonhole.

There was about the men a mobile bluster that blew over the surface of their reunion like a fitful wind. Beneath their assurance ran currents of uneasiness and anguish that linked them tacitly. They dominated the women, as if called upon by their rank as the male members of the family to assert sufficiency under present conditions. Struck at the heart of their cult for home and country, they reacted with the instant combativeness of democratic citizens.

Jean Bourdon represented industry.

He owned a brick factory in Paris and two others in the North. He called the great ovens in which the reddish brown bricks were baked "The Light of the Hearth." For on these bricks he had based his social status, the future of his sons, the security of his ripening years. Bricks were the symbols of society, the staunch bodies with which were constructed communities. They were earth utilized as a protection. They were solid and stable and honest. He believed in them as he believed in the traditions that had built up past and future generations.

In the midst of his prosperity the war had exploded, demolishing the structure of years. His factories in the North were in danger. Most of the men were called. Orders would be countermanded, business halted.

And he was one of many. Now that France was menaced by invasion, and the core of national pride emperiled, the people had risen as one host to defend what was most precious to them: their homes. All other considerations must be laid aside, all personal opinions sacrificed, all material consequences endured.

Raymond Bourdon, the oldest son and partner, was a stalwart florid man, who wore his opinions like his expensive rings, well in evidence. He was his father amplified, accentuated, with the wit, the prejudices, the caution and the generosity of his race. He was adored by those upon whom he imposed his will. His abundant vitality found vent in the present situation. He roared his challenge and contempt of the enemy.

Planted in the middle of an attentive circle, he bellowed his views.

"It was time! A year ago I could have told you what we were laying up for ourselves. We've been fools, my friends. . . . We

French are really too naïve! What . . . ! They infested the country like rats, nibbling at our commerce. They stole our credit. They grabbed our business, our art, our money . . . and we sat like a crowd of imbeciles, seeing nothing. When shall we learn that foreigners undermine a country? A fine lesson we'll have now. I, for one, am enchanted! I'll crunch one or two of them with pleasure. . . . Then perhaps we'll have peace."

His wife looked up at him with admiration. The loose coat she wore did not hide a promising contour. She was paying her toll to France for the fourth time.

"Eh, it is not such a bad thing," remarked Jean Bourdon, tugging at his mustache. "The socialists and their agitations announced nothing good to me. We should have had trouble with them and their eight-hour laws. Workmen are not what they used to be. . . . This will give them something to do, and to think about."

Doctor Lejeune, Madame Bourdon's cousin, shrugged his pointed shoulders, and muttered wisely, "A party postponed."

"Pooh!" snorted Raymond, snapping his fingers. "Let them leave us alone."

The Bourdons were assembled in the salon, which was used only on formal occasions. It was a big light room encumbered with furniture and ornaments. There were collected the most valuable household gods in profusion and diversity, dating the family history. Where they had been placed in the beginning, there they stayed, with the rigidity of petrifaction.

Most of the furniture Jean Bourdon had bought at an exhibition of modern interior decoration. He was proud of it as an expression of his progressive views. It clashed with the other objects in the room by its tendencies to outrage all the established lines of comfort and symmetry. Made of light wood and encrusted in pretentious colored designs, the chairs and sofa undulated in exasperated curves and patterns. Mingling with this expensive set, in unfriendly dignity, were plush chairs backed with lace, Grandmother Bourdon's armchair, and a crop of embroidered stools. The piano was forever closed and smothered beneath a piece of tapestry made by Madame Jean Bourdon when she was a girl. Two ponderous Japanese vases crammed with artificial leaves flanked a collection of photographs. China animals and china children congregated on a small gilt table. In a solemn looking cabinet were gathered precious relics of the family—a fan, a locket, a string of Venetian beads, a snuff-box that had descended from Jean Bourdon's father, a jade bottle and an Oriental box.

The old grandmother settled in her armchair, her cane resting against her knees. Her hands and lips moved incessantly, as if by puerile movements she kept an illusion of life. The others clustered around her in protective attitudes. Now and then one of them would bend forward and shout:

"What did you say, Mother?"

"Eh . . . eh . . . yes," she would croak, blinking her filmy eyes.

The talk would mount again, covering her mumbling. Then she would peer out in an anxious cunning way, a hand behind her ears in order to hear better.

"Eh, the miserable ones. . . . I remember in '70 . . ."

Pierre, the youngest son, wandered to the window as if to efface himself from the group. He seemed of another breed. A gentle air of abstraction misted his pale face, set it apart in an atmosphere of dreams. He looked like some ascetic apostle, stepped from a primitive painting. He had not spoken during the meal. His pale blue eyes had been fixed on his plate as if he saw there visions that removed him from actuality. No one noticed him.

But presently Lorraine, his aunt, joined him, and they two stood close together like strangers inadvertently admitted to a family council. Pierre slipped a hand in her arm, linking them.

"Poor little Pierre," she whispered.

Her young blonde face shone up at him wistfully. She smoothed his hand with her thin fingers, one of which carried a golden band. She was the widow of Raoul, Jean's brother. She moved among this family as if she did not belong to them. Her face had the look of early spring with lingering frosts and a sweetness that was delayed. But when she smiled at Pierre, it was as if the sun had thawed the last crusts.

"It is terrible," she added. And he agreed, "It is indeed."

Their voices were lowered. They withdrew to a world which contained secrets concerning themselves.

Pierre said, "For me it is nothing. But I am thinking of Natalie. How will it be for her?"

"She will be like the others."

His face contracted in pain. "But she is American, Lorraine. This is not her country."

"She loves it . . . and you."

"Ah, yes, but it is not the same. . . . It will be harder for her."

"She loves you," softly repeated Lorraine.

The blue of his eyes lightened. "That is why . . ."

And it seemed, as they stood there, that the anguish of another had entered the room, was pressing between them like a wounded creature asking pity. Their hands dropped.

"One can do nothing," sighed Lorraine.

The same fatality weighed upon them, bending their heads to the pose of surrender.

The voices of the others jangled in their ears like so many peremptory bells striking an hour.

Robert de Gency, Germaine Bourdon's fiancé, stood by the young girl, his pink face expanding in a patronizing smile. He was neatly molded in a blue uniform that bore the recent impress of the tailor. He held his narrow shoulders with a newly acquired assertiveness.

"They did not think to find us so solid. Never fear . . . we'll get them in a very short time. I, for one, predict that we shall be in Berlin by the autumn."

Germaine gazed at him with her soul in her round highly colored face. None was so brave as Robert de Gency. Not one of her brothers could compare with this dauntless lover of hers, who, only a few days ago, had been a mild, good-mannered young man, creditably embarked on his career as an engineer.

Doctor Lejeune caressed his golden beard with thoughtful fingers.

"Not so fast, Monsieur de Gency," he opposed. "They are strong . . . those people."

Henri, the second son, a tall thin youth, swaggered across the floor, his hands in his pockets. "We will get them," he pronounced.

His mother, her hands folded in her lap, allowed herself the luxury of a sigh. "For me, I wish it were over."

She was in her best dress—a black satin affair, profusely trimmed with lace and jet. Diamond earrings twinkled in her ears. Her pepper-colored hair was elaborately done in rolls and puffs. Her eyes kept an investigating look, as if she were continually examining details of domestic economy.

Louise Bourdon's children trotted into the room. The two boys, Jean Paul and Henri, strutted ahead, dressed in tiny uniforms that gave them the grotesque appearance of animated tin soldiers. Their cheeks bulged with the effort to look martial. They held miniature swords whose scabbards dangled around their chubby legs. Their infant sister toddled after them excitedly, clutching a trumpet.

They halted in the middle of the room and saluted to the accompaniment of applause and laughter.

Jean Bourdon swung Paul in the air.

"Here is one of our future defenders!" he cried.

Stimulated by the attention they created, the three mites became boisterous. Their shrill play pierced the air. They paraded, casting sly glances at their elders to detect further appreciation. Rose Marie blew her trumpet until the clamor of mimicked warfare evoked remonstrances. Their mother's fretful voice rose sharply, seconded by Raymond Bourdon's imperious rebuke:

"Enough, children . . . do you hear me?"

They subsided to a cowed little group in the corner, where they held a consultation, interrupted by involuntary outbursts.

"When are you off, Robert?" Jean Bourdon asked of his future son-in-law.

"I must be at my dépôt to-morrow."

Germaine's eyes filled with tears. But she made no protest. She and Robert moved aside and stood whispering, gazing at one another with shy adoration.

"I leave to-night," cried Raymond.

"So soon?" came a low distressed exclamation from his wife.

He patted her kindly on the shoulder. "Ah well. . . . Yes, my poor Louisette."

"And I to-morrow," said Henri.

Jean Bourdon drew a long breath. "The business will suffer!" Caught in a sudden gust of anger, he shook his fist. "Oh, the miserable ones! to have brought us to this! See you, if I were younger, and could leave the factory, I would be off with you."

His wife eyed him keenly. "You have enough to do here," she said.

"And where is our Pierre in all this?" observed Doctor Lejeune suddenly. He had been watching Pierre and Lorraine.

"Hola, Pierre, my young friend, and thou?"

Pierre turned quickly from the window and as if in spite of himself, was drawn into the center of the room.

"We have not heard from you to-day," continued the Doctor, rubbing his hands together softly.

Pierre gave him a faint smile. "I have nothing to say. I go with the others."

"And when is that?"

Raymond interrupted importantly. "Probably the day after to-morrow, isn't it, Pierre?"

"Perhaps." His long arms hung limply at his sides. He seemed to be staring beyond them, past the walls of the house, out into the city . . .

His father said with a slight accent of annoyance, "Come, my boy . . . a little more heart."

"Leave him alone!" exclaimed Madame Jean Bourdon. "Because he does not roar with the rest of you is no reason to find in him a lack of heart."

"He was to have taken his diploma at the Beaux Arts this Autumn," explained Jean Bourdon to the Doctor. "It is a pity, but what would you?"

The children were at Pierre's heels. The others, ranged in a semicircle, drew closer, their eyes claiming him. The room seemed smaller, full to overflowing with Bourdons.

They were his kin. And they were gathered together, perhaps, for the last time. A sentiment of fate was in all their hearts. The next day and the next and the next were so many roads leading from the home to those red fields where men were to fall like poppies beneath the threshing machines.

Pierre stepped forward, consulting his watch.

"I am sorry; I must go," he said in a constrained voice.

There was a murmur of protest.

"Ah, no!" declared his mother with sudden energy. "You are not polite . . ."

"But, Maman, I have another engagement."

Henri broke in mockingly, "I know! . . . You're going to see your American friends!"

Pierre gave him a steady look. "Precisely."

"You are always hanging around those people," complained Madame Bourdon. "Can you not stay with us these last days? One would think that you did not love your family."

"I have promised," said Pierre gently.

"Let the boy go to his friends," interceded the Doctor with a droll wink. "We have all been young. There must be a pretty woman,—hein, Pierre?"

"Always strangers," grumbled Raymond, and leaning his bulk against the mantelpiece turned his back on his brother.

"They say Americans are the most beautiful of all women," cried Henri in a roguish way. "For me, I prefer our own. They have more *chic.*"

As each of the men began offering opinions of the subject, Pierre slid up to his mother, kissed her and gained the door. Her voice followed him.

"When will you be home, Pierre?"

"In a few hours, Maman."

"Really it is not nice of you!"

Lorraine glided from the window and, edging the room, reached Pierre.

"Do not argue . . . Go," she whispered. He smiled at her gratefully.

"Good-by, every one," and with decision he opened the door and was gone.

"Pierre has strange manners," murmured Louise Bourdon sourly. "Jean Paul, keep still, or you will be punished."

"Jean Paul!" echoed Raymond's warning voice.

"He met many strangers at the Beaux Arts," pronounced Jean Bourdon gravely. "But all that will be over now."

With the air of a man who has settled a problem he leaned above his mother's armchair. "What do you say, Mother?"

Grandmother Bourdon wagged her head, stirring vaguely, as if a familiar voice had summoned her from sleep.

"Eh . . . eh . . . to be sure," she muttered, and her hands fluttered in her lap like wizened little animals that have been disturbed.

## II

THE doors and windows of the studio were open. Natalie Shaw wandered from the sunny little balcony to the couch upon which her brother sprawled, immersed in smoke and reflection.

"Felix, I've tried and tried to realize what it all means. But I feel dazed. I can't believe it!"

Felix raised himself on a bony elbow, frowning at his lowered pipe.

"Nobody can," he remarked gloomily, but as his sister stood looking down with a pleading expression, he lifted his lank figure from the cushions.

"Poor old girl!"

She turned away quickly as if to escape his sympathy. "You mustn't mind me to-day, dear," she apologized. He followed her to the balcony, flinging an arm over her shoulder.

"Buck up, Natalie!"

The thin iron railings were swathed in ivy. Geraniums and daisies in green boxes bordered the ends. The wide open door on the studio was framed with climbing nasturtiums.

"I don't see how I'm ever going to stand it," cried Natalie. "It is hard . . . it is brutal! And men like Pierre are going to suffer for it."

"Brutal indeed," muttered Felix, and added insincerely that perhaps governments would return to their senses before the entire world was plunged into confusion.

But Natalie shook her head and gazed out at the city, as if she were seeing it for the last time.

Felix struggled with trite words of cheer. But his own heart was heavy. For he also loved Pierre. Presently they two stood in silence, their tall thin bodies outlined against roof and sky.

The studio was perched high, overlooking roofs. They were very old roofs that seemed to have lived a long while and grown wise and mellow. Their quaint pattern was a seal of the city set in the sky. The dome of the Institut and the tower of Saint Jacques peered over a fringe of chimneys. And far away on its peak hovered the Sacré-Cœur. The bells of Saint-Germain pealed the hour like a theme, taken and repeated by distant bells calling and answering. . . .

The life of the city hidden among the roofs drifted upwards, a medley of interwoven discords. A hollow cooing of doves sounded near by. The smoke from chimneys unfurled gossamer draperies. And below in the shadowless old courtyard a little boy was playing at war. He pranced on an imaginary steed from one end to the other of the courtyard. He blew a toy trumpet and beat the air with an imaginary whip. His elbows were raised and rounded. He lifted high his bare knees as he galloped. He was a brave General at the head of his troops. The courtyard was peopled with enemies. Battles were raging. . . .

Natalie thrust out her hands with a hopeless gesture. "What is the use of this, if men are going to break what they have built?"

The sun bore down on the roofs, spread in a tangle of gold, enmeshing her in its dazzle, lighting her dark hair. She threw back her head to receive the shine full in her eyes. But when she spoke her voice sounded as if it came from shadows.

"Life has been a very simple affair for us, hasn't it, Felix? You have had your architecture, I my landscape gardening . . . and Pierre. We have been happy. There was no reason why we shouldn't be. We asked so little. When we thought about the world and its ways, we found theories that fitted humanity. We considered ourselves identified with an emancipated generation. And we took smugly for granted a process of evolution that included us. If people were vain, ugly, ambitious, envious, we consoled ourselves with our pet dreams. . . ." Her voice mounted in gathering passion. "And all the time we were rolling on . . . millions and millions of us . . . to this immeasurable catastrophe. Why, we don't even know what has happened! We're too shaken by immediate emotions to realize. . . . But later, when we see where our science, our reforms, our prattle of governments, our . . . civilization has led us, we shall sicken for shame. Then it will be too late. Do you think the men who are hurled in to this madness of destruction are going to remember why they kill, why they die? As they fall, they will think of their women, of their homes, of their broken dreams and crushed youth . . ." She broke off with a sobbing intake of her breath.

"Don't . . . don't take it so hard, Natalie. There have been other wars."

"Not like this one. We have spent years and years stocking up horror . . . and we called it other names. Look . . ." She pointed. A workman in a white blouse crawled over a roof and started hammering. The sun flattened him against the blue tiles, as if the force of heat pinioned him in place. He sang as he hammered, and the duet of his labor and his tenor voice seemed louder than anything else.

"They will take him away too," said Natalie. "They will put a gun in his hand and send him out to kill. Oh, the pity of it!"

Below, the trees in a garden spread their heavy foliage in crushed blots of green. The odor of flowers stirred the air.

Felix said gently: "Little comrade, all this is true. But there is no way out. And so we must make the best of it. . . ."

Pierre came into the studio so quietly that neither of them heard. He paused and looked at them as they stood on the balcony like two lovers. And he gave no sign until he had fixed the image of them in his heart. Whatever came to him thereafter, he would have this image intact.

Then he called—"Natalie . . . Felix!" and they turned and were with him.

Natalie went straight to his arms as she had never done before. "Peter, I thought you would never come!"

"Oh, my beloved . . ." was all he could say.

Felix took his hand in a warm steady clasp. "Old fellow, we're . . . we're mighty glad to see you."

"Must you go too?" Her voice wavered. "Does this mean that you must go?"

He nodded, smiling bravely.

She controlled herself with effort. "But you are not strong enough. You were never meant to be a soldier."

"I have two eyes, two arms, two legs," he answered. They stayed, looking at one another. Her eyes were dark with tragic vision.

Then, "It will not be for long," he consoled, quoting his brothers, and he added without conviction, "It had to be."

She answered, "If it were only for a day, it would be too long. It does not take a day to kill."

"I have no hate in my heart," he told her.

"Armies have no hate," she reflected drearily. "But they kill just the same. I shall never be resigned to it . . . never!"

Felix busied himself bringing out a siphon, a bottle, cigarettes. He could not do enough for his friend. He circled about Pierre, setting things before him. His lean good-natured face was animated with an imposed cheerfulness. "Have a drink, old man. Isn't it too warm in here? Natalie and I are lizards. Shall I draw the curtains?"

"Leave them," said Pierre quickly. "I love to look out."

It seemed to the three of them as if nothing had changed. They sat close together, relaxing into a habit of intimacy that soothed them like a shared illusion.

The room was a beloved place and wore its shabbiness as a lovely woman wears homemade clothes. Faded blue stuffs hung softly on either side of the window. The old wicker chairs and the couch had borrowed hollows and curves. Two high stools claimed relationship with two pleasantly littered work tables, one belonging to Felix, the other to Natalie. Books, flowers, architect's implements, watercolors and plans for houses and for gardens were strewn about. The notched gray walls were decorated with plans and sketches.

Felix clung to his pipe. He lolled in an easy chair, one bony leg propped over the other; and gazing benevolently at nothing in particular, talked about things he and Pierre loved: the Beaux Arts, pranks of comrades, the last competition. But he spoke of days that were finished, dwelling upon them as upon past joys. There was no mention of the future. And gradually his talk slackened. So they stayed in silence, until Pierre, drawing a deep sigh, wandered over to the balcony.

Natalie followed him there. Her eyes in the sunlight were the color of first lilacs in Spring. Her face was very still, like a flower on a hot day.

"I shall always think of you on this balcony," said Pierre. "You are a High Priestess of the city. Tell me how it can be so quiet, when all the elements that go to make up humanity are ebbing and flowing through those labyrinths? Life, after all, makes very little sound. To-day men and women are heavy with destiny, and the city holds them as a field does its seeds. We do not see the truth from here. The roofs are strong lids muffling the passions of men. The smoke that drifts so peacefully from the chimneys is cast-off dreams. And the windows . . . count them . . . you cannot. As soon count leaves on a tree. Yet behind each window life lies in ambush. To think, Natalie, that I am a builder of cities! I can cover the land with houses in which men can hide and scheme and love. . . ." He turned swiftly, his hand on her arm. His face was ardent with unfulfilled vision.

"Oh, my beloved, what gods we are! You the maker of gardens, and I the builder of cities. We will work together, won't we? Always together. Every house shall have its garden, where men may gather sweetness and rest for a while. The world will be the better for it. Houses are the images of their century. We will make them live in noble places even if their hearts are ugly . . ." His rapture slid from him like a receding wave. He stood brooding. "But now we shall have to wait."

Natalie echoed the word drearily, "Wait?"

"Until I come back," he said, and, with his hands lying on her shoulders and his eyes meeting hers, he promised:

"I will come back."

The bells of Saint-Germain were ringing. They rang as if they would never stop, as if their voices must reach the ends of the earth, awakening sleepers. They told men there was no way of escaping fate. They told women there was no use in weeping.

Natalie and Pierre walked out together, driven by the same need of mingling with the people this day. It was as Sunday. The streets were bright with flags that glowed like promises of glory, showing men why they should die. It was as if the same curiosity, the same anguish, the same pride had entered into the people as into a heart, and sent them out to seek one another and to share a universal experience. In a night their faces had been stamped by a common destiny. There was no class. There were no strangers. The throng moved like a deep sea with hidden eddies and currents.

Pierre and Natalie sat on the terrace of the Deux Magots, opposite Saint-Germain-des-Près. They ordered beer, but they could not drink. They were conscious of the minutes like little matches flaring and burning out, until there should be no more. They did not look at one another. Pierre's face slanted towards the sun. He stared at the sky as at a rare flower that is fading. Natalie watched the people flocking past, with an increasing sense of helplessness. Her identity was submerged in the compelling unity of the crowd. Their loss was her loss, their hope her own.

There was a newsstand in front of the terrace. The people fastened to it like flies. Men and women shouldered one another, greedy for morsels of news. Papers were shuffled from hand to hand. A fat wheezy man posted near the dwindling stock gave out his opinions like pamphlets. He was listened to respectfully. "They will never dare touch Belgium," he was saying. A peaked looking woman in shabby clothes pressed nearer, gaping up at him as if he were an oracle. A man with a purple ribbon in his bottonhole exchanged views with a bulky workman in corduroys. Street urchins nosed inquisitively in and out of the shifting group. Whenever a uniform gleamed it drew women like a magnet.

"You will not forget me?" Pierre said.

She turned and put her hand over his. The gesture fitted in with the hour. As he leaned towards her, she moved her chair, lessening the distance between them.

"I will wait for you," she told him.

"Natalie, I love you so. I cannot believe that we have only a little while longer together. When I am with you my heart feels like a clear fountain gushing up to the sky. All I do, all I am, belongs to you. There are times in a man's life when he comes to crossroads. Whichever way I look I see you, the sweet companion. How can I go on without you?"

"But I shall be with you." She felt very calm and strong as if there were no such thing as parting.

A squad of men marched by. They wore their patriotism like a loaded gun. There was a serious concentrated look in their faces, as if they were memorizing a long poem.

The gray square of Saint-Germain blazed in the heat. The church loomed with open doors and dusky vistas. Vendors peddled little paper flags and red, white and blue ribbons. Every one wore some symbol of France. Little men in new, ill-fitting uniforms, burdened with knapsacks and bulky parcels, hurried along, flinging a word or a nod at the women who stared at them with moist eyes. A bewildered old couple tottered past, clinging to one another. Every pace or so they would stop and peer about anxiously, muttering and shaking their heads. Motors packed with excited young soldiers flew up the Boulevard. An ambulance passed, gliding silently, like a gray bird.

"It is the unknown that is so terrible," Pierre said. "A few days ago life was arranged in a certain way. We had our own problems, our work, our play. We made our lives as a sculptor models an image. We felt safe enough—safe in our beds, safe in the streets, among our friends. We could not look beyond a given point, but we could plan. . . . Now all that is different. We belong to a national destiny. We are its chessmen, to win or lose. These men and women around us have lost their right to act independently. They must obey. There is no love that counts or serves. . . ."

"I can hardly bear it," murmured Natalie. "It is so unreal. The city is the same. Even this little café is the same as it was a week ago. It goes on serving drinks. Soon it will be dinnertime, and people will eat. Dogs bark and bells ring and there are funerals and children are born. Why don't they leave us alone?"

"Unreality is the only reality after all," reflected Pierre, touching his glass as if it were a bubble. "What we call unreality is what we have never experienced. Once it is thrust upon us, we become associated with it more relentlessly than with our past illusions. Soon war will be the only reality."

A dull humming overhead drew their attention. Circling in the blue sky like a gull was an aëroplane. Its long wings were sheathed in light. It seemed beyond the reach of any earthly anguish. Those below stopped and pointed, as people who in bondage suddenly see something free.

"A month ago that would have been a beautiful sight, another proof of man's mastery over the elements," murmured Pierre dreamily.

"To-day it means an item of destruction, an instrument of warfare. Who knows where it is going?"

Natalie shuddered. "For a moment I envied it. It seemed a tiny part of our best selves, escaping. Must we turn all our visions into forces of destruction? Peter, there will be death in the sky too, then?"

He nodded. "There will be death everywhere."

The great bird soared on its trackless way. The burry drone grew fainter.

A drunken man reeled by shouting the Marseillaise, flinging his arms about in crazy gestures. He slanted across the square grinning foolishly at the groups that elbowed him aside.

"Natalie, suppose I don't come back?"

"Pierre . . . please!"

"We must think of it," he said. "It may happen. When so many men go, my beloved, they cannot all come back. Should it be so, you must not grieve too much. You must always remember how happy I have been. I shall have left my youth and love with you as eternal things. You will go on working. You will create beautiful gardens . . . so many shrines to our love."

At the sight of her stricken face and wet eyes, he hastened on, "But I will come back, Natalie." Then as both of them were shaken by emotion—for he had lifted a veil and shown dark places—they braced themselves in renewed effort and smiled as if their faith were invincible.

"I know you will," she assured him. "We are foolish to fear."

"I want to tell you about my family," he began, stroking her hand as it lay on the small white table. "I have always avoided speaking about them. Now I see that I was wrong. They should have met you before. . . . I have never been free, dear—free as you understand it in your country. Here in France our ways are different." He smiled wanly. "Our families are little monarchies. The children cannot settle their lives as they will. You see, Natalie, we are taught to obey our parents even when we are grown up. In questions of career . . . and marriage we must consult our fathers and mothers. Most often it is they who decide. I wanted to be a painter, and my father made me an architect. But he was wise. . . ."

Natalie wrinkled her forehead and moved suddenly aside. "But, Peter, that seems a terrible thing. Where then is your individuality?"

"In our world that is not considered necessary," he said simply. "We are supposed to go on in the same way—keeping up the traditions of our elders, modeling our lives on the lives of our fathers. We are supposed to marry to suit them."

"Suppose they don't like me then?" broke in Natalie.

"When they know you as I do, they cannot help loving you. But . . ."

"But what?"

He hesitated. "It may be difficult at first, dear. They do not like strangers. But we must be patient." His voice grew apologetic. "They are good honest people with old-fashioned ideas. They may be afraid of you, Natalie. You are not like our young girls. You are a worker . . ."

"Wouldn't they be glad of that?"

He shook his head. "They would not approve of it, nor of your living here alone with dear Felix. But the war will change many things. They cannot refuse me when I come back."

"And if they should?"

"They will not!" he cried. "They must give in. To marry at all it is necessary to have their written consent. If they will not give it there are legal proceedings of course. . . . But they will not force me to resort to such things."

"I think it is all wrong and absurd!" exclaimed Natalie. "How can you stand it?"

He showed his distress. "Beloved, don't

condemn them. Remember it has always been so. For example, take my Aunt Lorraine. You will love her. She is very unhappy. Her husband, my father's brother, died two years ago. And Lorraine loves a young Polish sculptor. She dares not tell the family. They would feel bitter and hostile about her marriage, especially to a foreigner and an artist."

"She will not give him up for that, will she?" Her voice rose sharply. It was as if she were questioning Pierre about herself.

"It is harder now. They would never forgive her for marrying a man who is not going to fight. Poor Lorraine!" He bowed his head, and Natalie felt a dull pain in her heart because she realized that it never occurred to him that Lorraine might claim her freedom in spite of them. Resentment against them kept her quiet. She did not wish to hurt Pierre by an impulsive expression of an attitude. But for the first time in their relationship she saw him as a man of another race, other traditions, other cults, and it was as if suddenly he had become a stranger.

He leaned forward, divining her reticence. His face was young and tender. "Natalie, do not blame them. They are good people and they love me."

"But they own you," she said in a hard little voice. "You spirit is not your own, my Peter. You are going out now to fight, because they expect it of you. They expect you to work and to marry as they wish. I don't see any freedom in a life like that."

"There are other things," he answered soberly. "It is beautiful to be one of a clan. The children of past generations, our children, their children, compose a protective social force. The strength of France lies in its conservatism. Selfishness is a disintegrating influence." He spoke with the voice of his father.

"Pierre, I cannot understand. Every human being should have the right of choice. We have brains and hearts to use according to our vision and the place we elect in society. We need not be destructive elements because of that. . . . But do not let us talk of these things now. We have so little time . . ."

There was so little time. It seemed so with every one around her. Women clung to their men, children to their fathers. It was the solemn prelude to separation, the consciousness of impending drama and the disbanding of homes. Beyond stretched the unknown. The enemy was in the city . . . an alien presence sounding a tocsin.

Then she and Pierre spoke of precious fragile things. And every look seemed the supreme one.

## III

PIERRE was to leave early one morning.

Natalie and Felix drove together to the station at Charenton to see him off. It was a long way. Felix held Natalie's hand very tightly. His old slouch hat was pulled over his eyes. His lean brown face held an expression of inarticulate tenderness. Every once in a while he glanced at his sister, venturing a comment or a question. But the words trailed into silence. And he ended with an unlit pipe between his teeth.

Natalie did not seem aware of his presence. She sat in the open motor, swaying to its motion like a pliable reed. She was quiet as women are who renounce appeal. A monotonous rhythm ticked in her head: "He must go—he must go." But beyond that there was no sense of reality. The city claimed her, carrying her forward on resistless waves of fatality.

It was a radiant day—one of those days that pour light and fragrance from a golden urn. It did not seem possible that any living creature should suffer. But through the streets sounded the hum of departure. The city was giving, and giving its youth. The people of Paris streamed from their homes, obeying a call. Over the bridges, over the broad highways pointing to the stations, on foot or in carriage, in a steady exodus, went fathers, husbands, lovers, brightly dressed in the colors of war. Beside them, dumb or weeping, stoic or rebellious, were their women. These men, feeling the tragic eyes upon them, rehearsed their rôle for the drama. Some of them sang, others wagged bold tongues, others whispered words of comfort and hope. The gestures of yesterday were not those of to-day. All that had gone before counted for nothing. Men and women had loved, deceived, slaved, planned and desired in every intimate phase of existence, to reach this result: to yield up the weapons of life for the weapons of death.

It seemed to Natalie that she saw an image of Pierre and herself in every human couple she passed. She wanted to cry out to them—"Go back! . . . Go back to your homes. Oh, what are we all doing? . . ." But it was too late. They were possessed by national disaster.

The motor sped onwards, along the quais, past the Institut, past the blue and gold cupolas of the Samaritaine, the Palais de Justice, Notre Dame. The Seine slid like quicksilver under the glistening bridges. And as each familiar silhouette of the city dropped away, it was like a relinquished hope.

They were two of an endless procession traveling to the brink of sacrifice. They delved into a sordid quarter where slovenly houses squatted along the dingy streets, where the air was laden with the odors of poverty. Even here the wage-earners were setting out from one task to another. Families tramped to the parting place, dumbly conscious of impending loss. Hatless women in calico, heavy with child, trudged beside the wage-earners, their broods straggling behind. As the motor brayed its warning they stepped aside.

A young workman waved and shouted: "Vive la France!"

The cry swelled suddenly, bursting from many throats in united challenge:

"Vive la France!"

They flung it superbly to the winds, acclaiming the symbol for which they were willing to die.

Natalie, wakened as if by a bugle, leaned far out of the motor, echoing, "Vive la France!" until the uplifted fervent faces were lost to view. Then she turned to Felix for the first time that morning.

"How wonderful they are!" She was vibrant as a string that has been touched by a master hand.

"Why, certainly they are!" cried Felix warmly. "It's a great country. Just look at that! It must be one of those German shops we read about. Not much left of it, is there?" His manner was conversational, but he eyed Natalie anxiously as if not certain of her response.

She stared in the direction of his forefinger at a little white milk-shop which was crushed like an egg shell. It cowered among the other houses, a beaten alien thing, wrecked and despised by the mob. In its desolation and helplessness it sounded the awesome theme of war. There would be no mercy anywhere, on land, on sea, under the sea, in the sky. The little shop was the beginning and end of the drama.

"How can they!" broke from her.

Felix answered phlegmatically, "It's all in the game."

"What a game!" Her eyes rebuked humanity.

The city dwindled to ragged suburbs. The motor halted at the foot of a hill, where houses were scarce and dust lay thickly over meager leaves and grass. At the top of the hill was a barrier, beyond it the little station.

Up the steep road with lagging steps toiled the people. Their faces were turned towards one another, their arms linked. They spoke in low voices of the homely problems that made up their hard working lives, and they raised their voices to predict swift victory.

Then there was Pierre surrounded by his family. But it was a new Pierre in a blue coat and red trousers, who stood very straight, staring down the hill with strained eyes that hunted for and found Natalie.

Next he was saying timidly, "My American friends, Natalie and Felix Shaw! . . . Natalie, here is my father and mother—my brother Henri, who leaves to-morrow—my sister—my sister-in-law. . . . And here is Lorraine."

Natalie smiled at them with impulsive tenderness. They faced her in a compact little group, their hands automatically tendered in turn. They were very courteous. Monsieur

Bourdon, the spokesman, told her how often they had heard Pierre speak of his friends, and how kind it was of her and her brother to come so far to say good-by to his son. Madame Bourdon apologized for the place and the hour, as if she were a hostess under difficult circumstances, adding that they had three sons going to fight, and that the war was a terrible but unavoidable thing. France must annihilate once and for all an inherited enemy.

Their formal manner dismayed Natalie. She had been prepared to share with them the anguish of parting. Instead, her coming seemed to have tightened a closed circle. They encompassed Pierre, claiming a prior right over him. A tacit understanding linked them against an intruder. They bore their kinship to one another as the parts of a small strong machine are fitted into an integral unity. Their courtesy set her in an established scheme of society from which she was not supposed to move. The occasion dictated control and dignity, for as an institution they must be an example to those around them.

But Pierre did not appear conscious of their attitude. A little smile fastened to his finely drawn lips seemed to have been put there a long while ago and forgotten. It ranged from Natalie to the others, and back again, as if he were trying to connect them in his comprehensive love. Blue shadows lay beneath his eyes, forming sensitive hollows. He was pale and calm.

His father stood importantly beside him, with rounded chest and hands clasped behind his back. The red ribbon burned in his buttonhole. He seemed absorbed in weighty expectation, like a man waiting his turn to deposit gold in a bank. Louise Bourdon, sallow in the morning shine, whispered to Germaine, whose mild brown eyes showed traces of weeping. Henri, encased in a Zouave uniform, smoked Oriental cigarettes and chatted with Felix. Madame Bourdon, posted in front of Pierre, addressed him at intervals in a crisp decided voice. Her black suit fitted her neatly. But wisps of hair straggling from her veil gave her a vaguely disheveled look.

"You have plenty of chocolate. . . . I hope you are warm enough. . . . One never knows in this weather. . . . I will send you the proper things if it gets colder. . . . You will receive a package every week." She bent to remove a spot of caked mud on his sleeve, scratching it off with her black-gloved finger. Her forehead was creased in an effort to remember final instructions.

Lorraine Bourdon drooped in the background. Natalie looked at her with wistful sympathy. Once she met Lorraine's eyes transmitting a message, and she felt less lonely.

The group shifted. Natalie found Pierre beside her, and they two walked away, turning their backs on the Bourdons.

She slipped a small parcel in his hand, whispering, "Here is my picture, dear . . . and a little gold cross. May they keep you from harm."

With a swift eager gesture he thrust them in his coat, over his heart. "I shall wear them always, beloved." Then as if he were afraid that he would not have time to tell her all that he had to say he began to speak very quickly. From his manner she divined suddenly that supreme issues were at stake.

He said: "Natalie, I want you to know. You must know what has happened to me. Yesterday I was afraid. I could have killed myself to escape what lay before me. I was not afraid of danger or even death. I am no coward. But it was the mind . . . my mind, Natalie. They could not expect me to go out like a savage and kill without question. I had to have a reason stronger than my instincts, a reason that linked humanity and its manifestations with evolution and God. The thought was too terrible . . . the thought of millions of men hurled murderously against one another in lust and hate, the thought of ravaged land, wrecked homes, desolate women . . . the thought of millions of brains wasted, of the art, the science, the youth of Europe sacrificed. For what? There are the obvious motives for which men will fight . . . country and honor. But go deeper. Analyze these motives, and you will find men fighting because other men fight, or because they are afraid not to fight, or to acquire glory and power. I don't want to kill. I don't want to throw away any of the gifts civilization has given me, unless in offering my life I am benefiting future humanity. If I had been left alone I would have created, built, justified my place in a constructive society. Or else I should have been a soldier from the beginning . . . an automaton with a gun. But at first there seemed no reason. I was like a man battling in the dark with an unknown enemy. Then . . . then it came to me."

His voice was low and urgent, as if he were pleading a vital cause. When he told Natalie that he had been afraid, he bowed his head, but gradually he was lifted by the torrent of his words, until he stood in a kind of mystic expectancy, his face turned towards her with fathomless yearning.

He paused for an intake of breath, and Natalie waited, in tense immobility, her mind scouting ahead in treacherous zones of doubt and anguish.

Pierre continued as if reciting a profession of faith: "War is the outcome of the eternal forces of life—good and evil. These forces mingle cunningly with social evolution until such a time as, crashing through established elements, they take their primitive forms. We are the instruments composing the armies. We fight in sublime obedience to the law of good against evil. Do you not see, Natalie, that we are not only saving our national ideals; we are preserving the immortal functions of good? When I kill, I shall not be killing for a temporary advantage of boundary lines. I shall be suppressing just so much evil. In this gigantic duel, governments are symbols of greater adversaries. It could not be otherwise, could it? Think, that men of all classes, all religions, are massed together to-day for the purpose of destruction. It comes to that, whether we call it an offensive or a defensive war. There must be a deep significance in our sacrifice . . . What am I? My bayonet is a blade of grass, my mind a seed in the field. But if by adding my life to the millions I can assist a natural terrific manifestation of good, I must consider myself enrolled in an eternal cause.

"You love me, Natalie. You would not wish me to be untrue to myself. Tell me, have I not reasoned well? Have I not conquered my fear? We have only a few moments more. Tell me, beloved, am I deceiving myself? No . . . that cannot be. I feel so confident. . . . Look at your Pierre—how calm and confident he is? You believe too, don't you, that it is worth while? I am not a mindless atom being used for profit? I am not defending my country because there is no other way out of it? I am fighting in a final war. Our land will be sullied for the last time."

They were face to face in a supreme moment where the being wavers on a perilous edge. Natalie heard the secret voice that speaks at such moments, saying to her, "You know he has found what he wished to find. He has made the universe speak his language, that he might kill in peace. But all this will go for nothing, if you, the woman, cannot sanction his great illusion. Words, words! He needs a prop."

Then his voice rang sharply, like a creature calling out in the darkness: "Beloved, answer me!"

She answered: "You are justified, Peter the Knight."

His face was flooded with light. His eyes still probed, but there were now places in her heart where he might not look. All had not been well with him. But she had given him what he required in order that he might spill blood or die, convinced of a sacred mission. The facts of death were cruder than that.

She smiled bravely, knowing that she had appeased his torment at cost of her own good faith. For she did not believe the things he told her.

Still the people swarmed up the hill, gathering before the Buvette. A facile comradeship linked them. Their loud voices, interlarded with jests and scraps of song, mounted above the fretful whine of children, the muffled sobbing of women.

"Who would have thought it, old man, hein?"

"We'll get them."

"I could eat one or two for breakfast."

"They would taste too badly."

"It is hard on the women. My wife cried like a little calf when I left her."

"Well, you are lucky. My woman pushed me out of the house and ordered me not to show my face until I won a medal."

On a bench at the entrance of the Buvette, a woman crouched, weeping drearily. Every once in a while her grief was cut by fits of hollow coughing. Two bow-legged children tugged at her skirts. Her husband, an anxious peaked-looking little man, was talking very fast, glancing furtively at his comrades.

"Come now, my girl—no squawling! You promised me. We can do nothing about it."

"What will become of us!" moaned the woman, as if she had not heard him.

"Well, well, we'll see."

A tall fellow strode over to her and said kindly: "Your man will come back. Don't take on so."

"She is just out of the hospital," explained the husband in a low voice. "We have a sick baby at home. It is hard." The two men stood staring down at her with perplexed faces.

"Well, that is too bad," said the big man awkwardly. "But the Mayor will take care of her. There will be things arranged. . . ."

A pink-cheeked girl swayed towards him, offering him a flower. As she laughed up at him, he caught her around the waist and kissed her on the mouth.

The Bourdon family, to escape the sun, had assembled in the Buvette. The air was rank with the smell of cheap alcohol. Among wooden tables and chairs a noisy crowd jostled one another amicably, while coffee, and *marre,* a strong drink of the people, were served.

A lively little man who smiled easily, showing bad teeth, stood in the center of a group, brandishing his glass.

"Friends, let us drink to France!"

"To France!"

"To our meeting in Berlin!"

The voices mounted in jubilant confidence, clamoring victory.

Felix ordered *marre,* but only Henri, Pierre and Natalie would touch it. The Bourdons studied Natalie disapprovingly, as, with flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes, she raised her glass.

"To your return, Peter."

"To France," he replied, emptying his glass with a reckless motion. He had become suddenly animated, as if contact with this ebullient humanity had kindled his imagination. He moved restlessly from one to another, joining in the toasts, exchanging opinions with good-natured fellows who treated him already like an old friend. Natalie watched him with a brooding pity settling in her eyes. But he included her in his mood as if expecting her to share his enthusiasm.

"Are they not wonderful?" he kept exclaiming. "What a people!"

The little room seemed to contain all the emblems of life. A woman sat in a corner nursing her baby. She curved over the child with the beautiful unconsciousness of a simple creature.

"He will make a fine soldier some day," commented a friendly onlooker.

She smiled proudly. "I have two others."

"Every one does his duty," remarked the father in a complacent voice. An outburst of crude humor greeted his statement.

Near by a young man and woman sat locked in one another's arms. The woman's face was pillowed on her lover's shoulder. His head was bent over hers. They stayed so, in rapt immobility, hearing nothing, seeing nothing.

A sullen looking man stood alone staring vacantly at his empty glass. When he was spoken to he mumbled and shook his head. His eyes were set and glassy, his cheeks highly colored. An open locket, dangling from a cheap watch chain, held the picture of a young woman.

The train was late.

As the moments slid by an atmosphere of protracted suspense grew heavier. All had been said; all had been done. The same words and gestures had been used over and over again. There remained only the final act of parting. These people moving about on the brink of separation had been driven into expressions of feverish intimacy, and in supreme eruptions of emotion they had emptied their laden hearts.

Monsieur Bourdon kept looking at his watch with the mechanical gesture of a man awaiting an event.

Felix was talking in a high excited voice, clasping Pierre's arm as if arguing matters of life and death.

"Nothing doing in the old school until you come back. It's going to be pretty lonely. All the fellows are leaving. I saw Bretel at the Deux Magots. He's crazy to be off. And Chauvin? Poor old Chauvin! Remember how he used to squirm if he saw a mouse. I wonder what he'll do now . . . Say, next year we'll have to work hard. . . . Here, take another cigarette—take the whole package. Go on, Peter, old boy—I've got plenty. You'll write us, won't you? If there's ever anything I can do . . ."

Suddenly Natalie wished that Pierre would go quickly. Her control was slipping from her. The room grew blurred. She saw, as through a haze, Madame Bourdon, Germaine and Louise, a compact silent trio, staring at her stolidly. She saw Henri haranguing a small audience. His voice rose in high-pitched vehemence. The pressure of life in the low-ceilinged room was unbearable.

She made her way quietly to the door. The sun struck her like a golden shield. Overhead a blue sky spread its blue napery.

Pierre's words sounded again in her ears like the cry of a lost creature in the night. He had asked her: "Is this the road?" She had answered: "Yes, this is the road." And the road led away from her. Suppose she called him back now and said:

"Pierre, you asked me to help you deceive yourself, and I did. But I was wrong, because I could have lost you in this way. How could I know the truth? How could I explain the folly of the world by calling it wisdom? We are poor wistful beings following a dangerous illusion. You with the millions are about to demolish what you have built, labeling your deed honor, glory, goodness. Poor little men, you have traveled too far and not far enough.

"Pierre, why not kill without reason then, if weapons are put in your hands? Why call a slaughter-house a cathedral? Good and evil are eternal, you say; therefore one can never suppress the other. There are greater battlefields than those drenched with blood, sullied by men's trampled brains.

"Pierre, I believe that war begets war. It does not matter who strikes the first blow. Lust and hate are quickly conceived. The men who are killed will rot away and that will be an end to them. They will have shown other men how to kill and die at a word from a government. Men kill for the easiest reason, that they may be absolved. They die to save their land, to save future generations. But when the strong have perished, the weak will survive. Then what will become of our civilization? The newly born will be children of anguish, of hate, of disease. How can I tell you it is worth while?"

She would have cried out these things to him, but it was too late. She could not alter his destiny. She could not stop his going any more than she could stop the mighty machine set in motion. Her work was done.

Then Lorraine was by her side, a hand on her arm saying, "I know."

She looked at her strangely. "You know?"

Lorraine's low passionate voice wakened echoes. "The world has gone mad."

The touch of Pierre's hand on their shoulders linked them.

"Lorraine, is she not wonderful?"

Lorraine smiled gently. "She is all you have told me."

Pierre's face brightened to adoration. "But you cannot know how wonderful! You cannot know what she has given me this day."

Then the moment was upon them.

The tension cracked in a paroxysm of farewells. A clamor of life wrenched from life rose in mingled sounds of weeping, blessings and song. Parting, like a sharp knife, cut, smote, mangled men and women, severing heart from heart, eye from eye, hand from hand.

Pierre was saying the words.

"Good-by, Papa!" His arms were around his father's neck. He kissed him twice.

"Good-by, my son. Do thy duty!"

"Good-by, Maman."

"God bless thee, Pierre!"

"Good-by, my little Germaine. Don't cry your pretty eyes out. Your Robert will come back soon."

"Good-by, Henri. Good luck to you!"

"Good-by, Lorraine. I will think of you often."

He was coming nearer. Each word was like a dislodged stone rattling down a precipice.

"Good-by, my good Felix. Take care of her."

She stood with downcast eyes staring at a patch of green. The rumble of farewells was about her. She felt him coming, and put out her hand.

"Good-by, Natalie. I will not disappoint you." He kissed her once.

She lifted her eyes and saw his face. There was nothing left in the world but his face shining down at her. There were only his eyes and eternity. Her lips moved, framing the final word in a smile.

Pierre was walking away resolutely, past the barrier, where the women might not follow, across the road, to the train. The red and blue of his uniform gleamed in the sun. He looked very small and bright. How easily the thing was done! He had gone and nothing could call him back.

Felix was whispering, "Buck up, little comrade!"

The ground beneath her was crumbling. She would slide with it into some bottomless pit and lie there quietly until he should call her.

"Natalie, Madame Bourdon wants to say good-by."

How dared they use that same word! She put out her hand as if she had learned the gesture long ago. They filed before her one after the other. But she did not hear what they said. Even Lorraine passed on like a ghost.

When they had gone she looked and saw them picking their way down the hill. Madame Bourdon leaned on Monsieur Bourdon's arm. The others walked close together. They seemed to be turning their backs on a finality, marching gravely away like people returning from church.

Felix took her arm and guided her. And she stumbled down the hill among desolate women and children.

## IV

PIERRE wrote:

"Beloved, we are still waiting orders. The days are long and monotonous. But there is not a moment when your dear image is not with me giving me courage. I have gone with you, Natalie, along the way that leads to victory. You will never know what our last talk meant to me. Through you I have found faith. And I can go ahead now, without a backward look. What was I before this test of manhood? A weak creature dreaming of accomplishment, dreaming of building cities. I admit they were beautiful dreams, and long ago they seemed foundation enough for my existence. Mutilated dreams now, Natalie! I am a unit of an army . . . no more, perhaps less than the lusty fellow marching by my side. If his back is stronger than mine, his legs sturdier, his mind less perceptive, then he is the stronger soldier, the more cheerful comrade. I envy his fitness for the job.

"I do not know men yet. They are not as I imagined. But it seems to me that they are made of counter instincts, always battling; the creative instinct and the destructive instinct. I have seen eyes blind to sunrise, heavy heels crunching flowers under foot, heavy hands mauling a butterfly for sport. I have heard crude oaths and cruder stories that soil sacred things. I have also seen these men tenderer to one another than my mother has ever been to me. I have seen them divide their rations with a starving mongrel, stoop to pat a beggar's child, weep over a letter from home. Yet so few of them have grasped the spirit of this great crusade. They are ready enough for battle, although they do not yet know what battles mean. Many of them are born warriors. I say God help the others! Why was I not born a warrior? Then it would be simple. Enemies are easily found. But when the day's discipline is over, and I close my eyes, I never think of enemies. I see the dear School, and the faces of my comrades. I see the flowered balcony, the sloping roofs, the white breast of the Sacré Cœur. I see the bridges and the river and the little boats. And I forget why I am here. Then the breathing of the men, the silhouette of a sentry, the loneliness of the night sky, remind me of the land to be defended at cost of life. And I trace over and over again the last moments with you. I hear you saying, 'You are justified.' Write me, Beloved. Write me often that I am justified. Let me feel your hand on my shoulder. Let me hear your voice speaking, as my own, explaining this topsy-turvy world. You will not smile when I tell you that every night I look at the little gold cross with the Christ and wonder what He would do in the world today. . . . "

This letter and many others brought to Natalie his urgent need. She could only shape her answers like so many staffs upon which he might lean. But she sickened at what she was doing. For with every red day that passed, she became more conscious of the cost of her complicity. If the women of the universe could have risen shoulder to shoulder in mighty unison opposing the crime, if the awesome voices of mothers, wives, working-women had been lifted in a supreme cry for peace, uncovering their men's blind purpose, there would not now be death and desolation in the land. What had they done? The unborn might well weep in their foolish mothers' wombs, at prescience of their destiny. For such a war, made by men and upheld by women, menaced generations.

Graves instead of homes, crêpe instead of orange-blossoms, maimed men instead of mates, and devastated countries crushed by debt—all this was the price they would pay for their heroes. The thing saved would hardly be worth the thing lost forever. Could all the willing martyrs and the nimble fingers and the flooded eyes put one brain back into its smashed shell? Could all the prayers and blessings of stoic widows restore the youth of the century, revive a trampled field, build up a demolished village?

These men sent out to kill, for one reason or another, killed in the name of women. Such women as she, Natalie, were responsible for their deeds; in the intricate workings of their minds, they themselves labeled their killing with fair names.

Subtly linked by separate weaknesses, she and Pierre groped in a wilderness of doubt, lit by the uneasy torch of her love, while the prodigious madness of leagued men and women shattered the foundations of society. And as an unleashed mass rolled onwards bellowing God's sanction, it was met by unleashed masses calling their countries' names and liberty. Then life was counted no more than a poppy beneath a threshing machine. The factories of the world vomited death-dealing shells. The land became a trampled hunting ground where men and beasts were merged. Frontiers were in smoke, villages flamed, churches toppled, cities were besieged, forests uprooted, harvests wrecked. The tortured roads were black with homeless exiles fleeing from friend and enemy. Panic swept broadcast like a devastating hurricane.

Pierre wrote:

"Beloved, we may be called any moment. We are ready. The life of the congregated male is simple. It has a bold brave appearance, beneath which lurk all the human weaknesses. There are men here whom I pity, because they have no loves, no women to spur them on to victory. When letters come, they sit and mope, eying us defiantly as if they did not need the reënforcing words. War is a trade. But, I should say, a trade not invented for imaginations unless plied in regions of madness. The real life is apart from the trade. And a troubled heart and a reeling brain turn to the creature best able to supply what strength is needed at a crisis. Where should I be without your letters, Natalie? That is why I beg from you the privilege of sharing parts of them with less fortunate comrades. You know how sacred they are to me. But I feel them so inspiring, so stimulating, that I should be a poor patriot to keep them for myself alone. Since you, a woman of brains and heart, judge with me that our armies represent right over wrong in a universal sense, you render our job of killing and dying sublime. If I do my duty, Beloved, you will have written it in letters of gold. . . ."

Then Natalie went out into the city and hunted for beauty that she might send it to Pierre and his fellows. The beauty she found in sacrifice, in generosity, in patriotism, was more poignant than anything she had ever seen. It was absorbed in the pitiless moment as spilt blood is sucked into the ground. The fretting multitudes were playthings of an implacable illusion. Their resignation doomed them. People of all classes, jolted from their grooves, were struggling through a process of readjustment; but it did not alter raw nature such as it has always been under stress. Anguish ennobled or poisoned according to hidden traits grown rusty from disuse.

They huddled together, drawn close by a jealous racial instinct of preservation which blinded them to universal issues. War was with them, upon them, disintegrating, intractable. They might squirm or pray, lose bravely or inveigh against fate; a national disaster paralyzed their judgment and riveted them, helpless victims of a stupendous irreparable blunder involving their country's youth. As they proclaimed, it was indeed not their fault. The initial fault was graver than the deeds entailed, less perishable. For it was rooted in the immeasurable ambition of mankind, and its shoots, nourished by unscrupulous capital, menaced the world. What could the peasant wrenched from his fields, or the day laborer, or the scholar do, once drawn into the outspreading tentacles?

Now the ponderous machine of relief work began to grind out red tape, petty officials, Utopians, ambitious organizers, and experimental philanthropists. The remedy for miseries lay pat. Soup kitchens and canteens sprouted plentifully over the city. Daily food and pennies were doled out to the poor, the sick, the bereaved. Men were mended, women and children were clothed and fed. What more hopeful proof of awakened responsibility could there be than this ready response to exhaustless need?

Natalie was moved to glowing pride by the spontaneous example set by her country. A source of limitless bounty, it gave and gave and never ceased giving to an enduring humanity. The upturned palms of Europe met no refusal. To the grateful eye such prodigal beneficence, such gracious gestures from the pacific millions, indicated a marked preference, a choice of distress to be succored.

Natalie found here a theme to gladden Pierre's heart. She wrote: "There is nothing we can do that we will not do. If neutrality means an uncrippled power of service, and an unprejudiced conscience, then it seems fortunate we still retain our freedom to give where need is most. Feel this with me: the wounded and the homeless are cared for by devoted women and provided for by the sacrifice of our people. What do you make of it? Hands and brains are backing you, my Pierre."

But she did not write him of the nearer view of charitable institutions, nor of how consistently she was defeated when she looked for beauty through a crimson lens.

There were moldy labyrinths in the city beneath the fair Christian show. And in these murky corridors sneaked ugly things like rats, nosing for spoils. The festering envy and ambition of little politicians, scheming great ladies, smug financiers and sentimental old maids and virgins scuttled from dark shadow to shadow, nibbling at foundations. Now and then an edifice built for the salvation of man would crack and, through the yawning wound, betray the noisome habitants of these dark places at their furtive work. But as quickly covered, hungry men and women would tread again the mended spot, judging themselves secure because they were benefactors or victims of a social system. And prowling through the city on padded claws went other man-made things: suspicion that sniffed out innocent citizens and made criminals of them to satisfy a doubt, denunciations of an anonymous breed that stained the undesirable stranger within the gates, intrigue that tangled motives into webs and caught the unwary humanitarian, lies, ruthlessly wielded power, misspent coins, sly plots among sly women and discontent that gnawed at the vitals of charity. Passions and emotions were magnified. The noblest and the basest human beings worked side by side with separate vision, to regenerate, mend, satisfy, a scarred, sad world.

Meanwhile the hostile forces crossed a forbidden border, hurtled against fortresses, grabbed cities, wrecked, ravaged, tore a little country to shreds, and plunged on their relentless way into France. The thunder of guns from Mulhouse to Liège sounded in dreadful monotony.

Cruel birds, harbingers of invasion, circled over the city, casting messages of death. But they were mocked at by a spirited population who flocked to the public squares and highways, there with uplifted noses and taunting fists to fling their defiance skywards. The enemy offered them a spectacle worth hooting at. Women who had seen their men go, welcomed fiercely the fleeting glimpse of danger which seemed to link them with the fighting millions. The city was so immense and vital; the war birds were no more than impotent vultures.

And again Natalie wrote: "The courage of the people—your people, Pierre—is beautiful. No gunners at their posts can rival the little trades-people guarding their business, the stoic active women, the patient old men who cling to life waiting the victory. And I could tell you also about the street urchins whose sharp tongues aim as straight as a bullet. Yesterday afternoon, when our usual visitor was flying overhead, and the usual bombs mussed up a house or two, a funeral passed. The ragged lively boy standing near me cocked a knowing eye and exclaimed, 'There goes one who has no curiosity!' He hit the keynote. Call it curiosity or courage, there are no signs of fear among the people. They wear their mourning like a symbol of hope."

But as she wrote her heart was sad and bitter. She wondered why the staunch stuff that was in these people must be shaped into garlands for graves and images of hate. Sprung from a Revolution and Napoleonic wars, their spirit might well have led them through brilliant generations to bloodless victories in art, science, industry. The mischief was farther back than the present evil. A race attacked centers upon itself, suspecting treachery in every stranger's smile, barring jealously its schools and commerce from the divined enemy of to-morrow. Hereditary hate engenders distrust, shapes future wars. War breeds covetousness. It is like a fence between a hungry man's spring and a thirsty man's vegetable garden. The hungry man may not satisfy his appetite though his neighbor's vegetables are near, nor may the thirsty man drink at his neighbor's spring. And so they glare across the fence, plotting stealthily to acquire by force a portion of earth's bounty denied them. It soon becomes matter for a quarrel. One vegetable or a cupful of water does not suffice. Each desires to keep what he has, adding to it his neighbor's bit.

Grim news reached the city.

Natalie saw another exodus, less affecting than the first. She saw hysterical women crowding to the banks and clamoring for gold; she saw embassies besieged by assertive patriots scrambling for passports. The bright-plumaged birds whose chiffons bore the marks of French artists, whose manners and pretensions glittered with cosmopolitan veneer, whose social ambitions thrived best on foreign soil, deserted the menaced city in jabbering disarray. Trains and boats were loaded with their lamentations. More comprehensible were the mothers and invalids who sought to remove their children and their ailments from the range of guns.

But there were others who remained and went about their business of relieving miseries, for which Natalie gave them great credit; more so as in the end, unless they were very wealthy or very clever, they encountered an amount of ingratitude proportionate to their good will. The consciousness, however, of realizing a part in the humanitarian drama compensated those idealists whose contact with co-workers proved a disillusioning experiment. Natalie on her quest for beauty found an expensive imitation of it in conspicuous places and a comforting measure of it among the untempted humble classes. She pitied them all, rich and poor, for their blind obedience to a century's folly. But this she could not write to Pierre.

One day she and Felix received a visit of a young American journalist, Maxwell Clark, whose appearance she greeted with wistful expectancy. Surely this man of facts would have weighed questions of loss and gain, and would become to her a spokesman of her inner rebellion. Natalie reflected, with a wry consciousness of irony, that she looked to this casual acquaintance for moral support in her brain's torment, exactly as Pierre had turned to her, placing his conscience in her keep.

Maxwell Clark was a keen wiry young man loaded with enthusiasms. He had rushed through war zones, noting accurately the impressions which were to be presented in influential sheets as summaries of the European situation. A valuable guest and mouthpiece, he had been handed preciously along the German lines, and later, escaping from Teutonic courtesy, had transferred himself and his pro-Ally sympathies to the French and Belgian front.

He began in the usual way, by proclaiming a civilized distaste for war; then launched into a panegyric of it, using such glib sophisms as were best calculated to enliven his imagination and enhance his manhood. Thrilled by the dashing spectacle, fed on tales of heroism, he had risen to the bait. Still warm with the hospitality of fine men, intoxicated by the racket of death, swayed subtly by the show of medals and uniforms, he discoursed fluently upon democracy in the trenches, awakened virility, healthful occupations, brotherly sacrifice, courage rewarded, sport, glory, patriotism. And he ended with a superb gesture which swept his countrymen into the field, claiming in sonorous words their fraternal duty to the Allies.

Felix puffed wisely at his pipe, meditating upon these things. But Natalie, whose expression had altered from its first eagerness to sharp disappointment, flung tartly at the young journalist:

"Why then don't you enlist right away? I hear the Foreign Legion is an excellent death trap for criminals and neutrals." Felix lowered his pipe and glanced at her with lifted brows.

But Maxwell Clark, his fluency stemmed, murmured uneasily "I . . . I have my work."

"So had they!" She rose abruptly and loomed above him with stern young face and darkened eyes. Then the floodgates swung aside and gathered pain rushed out.

"So had every man in every warring country to-day! Beginning with the pretext of a murdered tyrant and ending in a world's war—a pretty job they've made of it! They've given fine words as sops, and when it was too late for dozing diplomats to mend the mess, they trumpeted a nation's danger. The thing was done when the first fools took up their guns and left their homes. France had to go. Of course she had to go when governments decreed the killing!"

Her voice trembled upwards. "And you, what do you know of it all? They've shown you what they wanted to. You'll write well of democracies and sacrifice. But it's a pity you can't give your readers a taste of shell. We free people over there"—her arm swung eloquently in a direction—"we free people, young, naïve, quixotic, will listen gladly to the brave bright stories. Just as small boys absorbing dime novels dream of imitating their hero's exploits, knight or bandit, so the American people will soon be dreaming of trumpets and uniforms—and glory—dreaming of protecting their great nation from a problematic invader, filling their minds with military bravado and their hearts with romantic notions, while the government to please them taxes and taxes. . . . ! Then some day they will be caught. Oh, you—all of you who can reach them—why not tell them the truth before it is too late? Why not draw aside the beloved flag that hides dead sons and lovers and let the women and the workers see a real battlefield, read deep in the souls of men who kill?"

"She's right!" escaped from Felix. But Natalie did not hear him. She was staring beyond the two men, out at the warm sky. She was listening to the distant thunder, to the moaning of many women, and the hoarse cry of the wounded.

"Why not tell our people of the men cooped in the trenches through days of sweltering heat . . . soon through days of cold and driving rains . . . to be trapped like dumb animals, murdered by an unseen enemy? Our scientists have thoughtfully provided long-range guns, no doubt to spare the feelings of the enemy." Her laugh was mirthless. "The democracy of the trenches? A democracy of prisoners! Let one of those democrats say to his officer, 'I've got a sick wife and children at home. I need to earn their bread. I must go back!' A handy wall and a bullet would be his answer. Sport? Football or elephants could supply that need. Why not tell our people that the men are filled with rum and ether before the bayonet charges? . . . filled with madness to make the killing easier! It is comforting to know that noble work is accomplished under such influence! Why not tell our people of the disease that hides its ugly face behind the paid woman's smile; such few women as are smuggled inside the lines where wives may not go, to appease a lusting regiment? Why not tell them of the men who, with dreadful bodies torn apart, lie rotting between friend and enemy unrescued even in their final agony? Why not tell them of putrid gases that decay lungs, of maimed men, blind men, the wreckage of battles? Let our people see and hear the horror and then judge if any cause is worth the thing called war! Defended land? Look at it! Honor? What of the fatherless offspring and the heart-broken women? Glory? A tattered uniform spotted with a fellow's blood. Patriotism? A country crippled by debts."

Natalie paused for breath and Maxwell Clark edged in a faint remonstrance:

"I thought you loved France?"

Her passion mounted to its climax:

"Love France? I love every stone in this city! I love every blade of grass in the land! I love every little poilu in red and blue! But do you ask me because of my love to acclaim a calamity which reaches beyond frontiers and includes the world? For what they are beneath their petty faults, I love the brave sweet heart of this race. Their language is music to me. I love the peasant and the woman who wheels the flower cart and the honest fellow in corduroys. Of all the armies out to-day, the French army is most beloved. Their spirit is indomitable. But all women weep the same tears, and the graves are shaped alike in every country. It's war I hate . . . stupid, sordid war. How can I know who will be the next enemy, while there are armies and world markets? The blood lust and greed is in them all now. They prate of a last war and give their children uniforms, tin soldiers, toy swords. They speak of an eventual peace and teach their children vengeance. They prattle of more armies—ever more, more battleships, more bombs. What will all these things be doing then when war is at an end? Shall the people be supporting idle forces? What of the people? May they never learn their trades with any feeling of security? Must mothers bear sons to offer up to future enemies? I hate it! I hate it all!" She sank shuddering in a chair, her passion spent.

Silence hung between them until Felix said gently, "I didn't know you had it in you."

The comment roused in her a sense of self-betrayal. She had voiced those hidden things which even Felix should not hear because of Pierre.

Maxwell Clark, released from hypnotized attention, gave a low whistle. "As you describe it, it isn't pretty."

She managed a wan smile. "You must forgive me. I forgot myself."

Visibly impressed, the American attempted compliments upon her eloquence. But Felix, perhaps to change the subject, burst out, "The whole thing is a damn shame! We have a dear friend who's fighting now. Natalie and I worry a lot about him."

"I see," murmured Clark.

"He's . . . he's an awfully clever chap," continued Felix. "Studied with me in the Beaux Arts. He and I were great pals." He cleared his throat and put a hand on Natalie's shoulder. "She can tell you. Why, as far as that goes, Natalie's the one to keep up his spirits." She felt the journalist's keen eyes upon her as Felix blundered on. "She's always writing him how wonderful the people are . . . and how worth while it is to fight for his country. In his last letter he speaks of how beautiful her letters are, how he couldn't do without them." He fumbled in his pocket. "Thought I had it here. I guess for all she says she believes in a man doing his duty. Don't you, old girl?"

"Of course she does! We all do!" cried Maxwell Clark heartily, sparing her an answer.

But when after other efforts at conversation, which she discouraged, he took his leave as exuberantly as he had come, Felix went up to her.

"You never told me you felt that way, little comrade," he said. "If you do, really . . .

how can you . . . ?" His anxious look finished the question.

"How can I what?" Her smile was baffling.

"How can you give Pierre so much?" he ended lamely.

"I give him what is in my heart." She could not tell Felix at what cost she played her rôle. The thin barrier of withheld confidence separated them. His honest face showed perplexity.

"You're a strange kid, Natalie," he said at last. "You got me going the way you talked. And yet you write such different things to dear old Pierre. What would he have said if he had heard you?"

"He never will," Natalie answered drearily.

## V

THE women knitted.

They knitted like Destinies bending fatefully over their everlasting skeins. Their hands were never still: the coarsened fingers of toil, the exquisite fingers of fashion handled wool of many colors as if it were their final task on earth. In the great homes, in the stifled places of the poor, in theaters and shops, gardens and streets, women of all classes knitted, chattering of their absent heroes, boasting in watchful rivalry of the wounded and the dead, trading exploits that warranted their relationship to the defenders of France. They had achieved a cult which permitted, in noblest form, the expression of lives stunted or envious, yearning or vain, passionate, sentimental or fanatical. Their men, who only a short while ago were perfect or faulty sons or mates, had with one sublime gesture of parting become mysterious factors in a mighty struggle. The man and the rascal shared the same superhuman virtues. In the armies they were mere units; in the hearts of the tragic, rapturous women they were the determining elements of victory. Had they beaten their wives in peace times, they were now beating an enemy; had they loved indiscriminately, they were now vowed to one cause; had they shirked their duties as citizens, they were now accomplishing a supreme duty.

The women knitted. And the clicking of needles was a multitude of little tongues telling tales. They told of the mothers who dreamed about cradle days when the new male in their arms was a godly specimen, fortunate in prospects; dreamed about the uneasy boyhood, where the shaping spirit wanders on forbidden ground; dreamed of the youth thriven in spite of hardships or indulgence, snatched now from fruitful occupations and taught a warrior's trade; dreamed of the blighted being which might come limping, groping home to live on charity, another stone about the nation's neck. There was a reward, as rewards go. The gratitude of a nation for a spent life remains an inheritance, mortgaged perhaps, but nevertheless to be jealously guarded for the future. If such gratitude does not ensure the safety of generations to come at least it provides graves, medals and archives in tribute to the beloved dust.

The song of the needles told of women: women who knitted because of housewifely habit or economy, as once they had mended; women who, consumed by tardy romance, regretted bitterly their past unimaginative domesticity, imaging their men as misunderstood potential lovers; women who, helpless in their unsolicited independence, prayed for the return of the master; women who, enchanted with an unaccustomed freedom, discovering latent natures and brains, prepared future problems for their unsuspecting mates; women whose sentimental craving, hitherto unsatisfied, found passionate outlet in mothering armies.

The House of the Bourdons gave all it had to give.

Grandmother Bourdon, huddled in her armchair, fumbled with wool and needles. But her palsied fingers refused the task. Only the old eyes behind the spectacles retained sparks of will. She babbled weakly of the '70s, reiterating forgotten tales of heroism. Her memory wandered in rusty battlefields, evoking ghosts. Her quavering voice mounted in a tremolo of hate, cursing the enemy. She saw her husband at the head of his troops urging them on to victory. She heard the martial sounds of long ago. And she was never quiet except when her tired head on its wizened stem sank forward in fitful doze over the unfinished work.

Louise Bourdon stayed in her bed and knitted, with a querulous eye upon her children. She worried when they were out of her sight; she worried when they were with her.

"Wait until your father gets back," was the constant refrain. A big black crucifix on the wall reminded her of Christian resignation and other precepts borrowed from divine philosophy. But she croaked constantly of lugubrious possibilities, vowing to follow Raymond, her husband, to the grave should he be sent there. The fate of other men affected her superficially. She mourned them with trite phrases unwatered by tears.

Germaine Bourdon knitted pink and white articles for her Robert, inwardly moved by the intimacy she imagined involved in such service. Her handiwork was for the male, her future husband. She worshiped him inarticulately. He was like no other man. He symbolized France, the armies, victory. Her little room was a shrine where on the table near the bed stood his photograph draped with a small flag and flanked by two narrow-throated vases always freshly filled. His letters, tied in tricolored ribbons, were laid in a satin box. At night she knelt by her immaculate bed and prayed candidly to the Virgin that her lover might be guarded from harm. But her romance lent to the war a roseate glamor. She had never seen death. And she thought that lovers were invulnerable. Her dreams, untroubled by grim visions, brought Robert to her, brave in a spotless uniform, his clean sword uplifted, gleaming in the sun.

Madame Jean Bourdon knitted for two of her sons and for those other sons of France who were without mothers. She visited the poor and the sick of the quarter, and helped the wives of those who had left the factory at the first call. She was never still. With whitening hair and tightened lips she went methodically about her business, accepting the responsibilities her country had put upon her. Once a day she sought the church as a haven, and in the calm gray place among black kneeling women prayed that her sons do their duty. Inflexible pride dwelt in her heart. She had given three men to France. She blessed them from afar but never wished them back. She held her head erect and when she talked to other women, she spoke of her sons as gifts.

The little trades-people knew and respected her, united by a bond that loosened their tongues. The unique topic held them all:

"Have you any news to-day, Madame Bourdon?"

"Thank you, a letter from Pierre and one from Raymond, my eldest son, who by the way is doing finely. His Colonel congratulated him last week on his valiant conduct. He and four other men met an advance guard of Uhlans and drove them off, though they were outnumbered, killing three who it seems tried to hide in a wood. You can imagine how proud I was . . . And your son?"

"Jacques is always the same. He writes only of victory. He says the men are mad to get at the brutes. They will be well served, I can tell you."

"Ah, yes! My second son Henri tells me that there will be nothing left of them. When I think what they have done to us! . . . One cannot have mercy with such people . . . Well, we have learned our lesson."

"That we have, Madame Bourdon. But if we had only known . . . the monsters!"

"We can have no peace until we beat them."

"When will that be?"

"Soon, soon, Madame. With such sons as ours . . . !"

"Sometimes I feel it is hard, Madame Bourdon. Jacques is my only one. His father is dead. The business is hard. . . . I depend on him."

"Come, come, Madame, you must not cry. If he is taken, it will be in a fine cause. And there will be no more wars."

"God hear you, Madame Bourdon! Well, what is must be."

So with raised solemn voices the poor mothers settled a world's destiny, consecrating their sons to death in order that there might be no future wars.

Meanwhile Jean Bourdon, whose ruddy face showed signs of strain, yearned in silence for Raymond, his eldest son and partner. He had not only given his sons to France; he was likely enough to give his snug fortune. Only a miracle could save his factories in the North. Judging from rapid tragic events such a miracle would not happen. His factory in the city was temporarily closed. The economies of years upon which he had based his social status, his family's prosperity, a comfortable old age, must soon be utilized to tide over the crisis. The principles of a thrifty life yielded beneath the pressure of national disaster. But Jean Bourdon fretted as if a vital organ had been attacked. For though the Bourdon family were sharing a common peril, according to bourgeois precepts they might not reveal weak spots in their stronghold. Whatever anxiety they endured must remain within the enclosed circle.

Madame Bourdon, with years of practical experience behind her, managed the affairs of the household expertly, resorting to ingenious devices to keep up appearances without wasting a penny. At all costs the children's dowry must be saved. She did not forget that the de Gencys had shrewdly bargained for Germaine's marriage portion; and her pride forbade her failing an arrangement made before the war. When the time should come their petty title must be paid for according to its value, in order that the race of the de Gencys allied to the Bourdon's money should flourish and prosper.

Two maids were dismissed and Germaine and Lorraine set to work with good will mending, cleaning, and attending to Grandmother Bourdon, Louise and the children. When the family assembled for meals, each was conscious of the advisability of a moderate appetite. The best morsels went to Grandmother Bourdon, who ate greedily, and to Jean Bourdon, the head of the family. Lorraine was always served last. But Lorraine, paler, more reticent than ever, hardly touched her food. She seemed consumed by some inner torment that dulled her eyes and veiled her voice. Often when Germaine spoke of Robert de Gency, she looked at the young girl wistfully, as if the naïve romance resolved some hidden chord in her heart. But she said nothing.

During these meals, while Madame Bourdon supervised the plentifully watered wine and the jealously measured portions, they tried to forget the gaps in the round table, dissembling the ever present ache and fear. Then Monsieur Bourdon talked of his sons. His voice recovered its resonance and boomed the exhaustless theme. The red ribbon marked his rounded chest, a pompous reminder of a debt. As he talked of Raymond's last exploit, of Henri's reckless courage, of Pierre's gentle spirit, it was as if the voice of France rang through the room. It was the voice of sacrifice issuing from the hearth where lay smoldering ashes of past hate. It was France and only France living in the Bourdon hearts. The Belgians and the English and the Russians were but the mighty chorus to the Marseillaise. There was a sublime and tragic intention in the chant of war that mounted from the Bourdon throats, a concentrated essence of defiance that included superbly international issues in this one dramatic struggle for life. As the invaders thundered past rivers and plains intoning the "Wacht am Rhein," Jean Bourdon's voice boomed louder in challenge, "Vive la France!"

His factories in the North were doomed. The menace was tightening about the city. But when Madame Bourdon suggested sending the Grandmother, Louise and the children to a place of safety, Jean Bourdon roared:

"Never! We all stay in our home, no matter what happens. The Bourdons do not run away. But I tell you they will never get here unless it be over the bodies of every man in France."

And Madame Bourdon, looking at his crimson face, his blazing eyes, his clenched fists, bowed her head, saying:

"We will all stay then," and went to the church to pray that her sons do their duty.

## VI

LORRAINE condemned herself for loving the Polish sculptor.

Once at her timid question he had answered in a harsh, wild voice, "Why should I die for them? What have they done for me?" and he had stared at her with the look of his suppressed race, distrusting the conqueror whoever he be. Then he had gone on his knees, lifting his head with its red beard and mystic eyes, and—like a little child repeating a sad story—had told her of the silent peasants, his father and mother, of his exile, the biting poverty in a strange country, of his love of God and all beautiful things, and of the arid loneliness until she had come to find him. And she in turn had told him of her saddened girlhood, her barren life with Raoul Bourdon, his death and her present existence marked with the Bourdon seal. They had wept together that day, like two poor creatures inextricably tangled in a pitiless system.

Then she had gone back from the shabby studio through the hushed city where the shadow of loss lengthened already across the thresholds: back to the House of the Bourdons where the women knitted and talked of their absent men. And she was ashamed. For it was as if she had introduced a furtive enemy into the house. She saw Raoul Bourdon's gray eyes fixed upon her in cold rebuke. When the land reeked of blood and the awful voices of the women cried vengeance for the martyred youth, how dared she cherish a male being, an alien, who preferred cutting stone to cutting down the invader? What right had the puny brain to conceive beauty in the face of ordained destruction?

She thought of gentle Pierre marching forward over crimson fields, and of Natalie, who had sent him out with a smile on her lips. She remembered that Pierre had said at the parting, "You cannot know what she has given me this day," and she envied Natalie fiercely for that which she had been able to give her soldier lover. But Lorraine could not wrench from her heart her love for the artist. She yearned to go to him, to place herself by his side, bearing all ills for his sake. He did not belong in this day of violence. Yet he suffered for an ideal, just as other men suffered for an ideal. Why should he not be allowed to choose his ideal and abide by it? She believed in him and, believing, doubted herself. Women were giving and giving. Only she, a Frenchwoman, was not giving what was most precious.

All day long in the House of the Bourdons she worked like a slave that she might earn peace of mind. No homely task was too heavy for her. She listened patiently to Grandmother Bourdon's senile mumblings, obeyed Louise Bourdon's caprices, tended the children, put herself at the beck and call of the family. But at night, when weary of soul and body she crept to her room, the image of the beloved burned in the dark and she heard him say again, "Why should I die for them?" His thin face, the mystic torment of his eyes, the ardent orange-red of his beard appeared before her, an intangible substance that formed and dissolved in endless spectral moods, now pleading, now stern; as if in the night his longing sought her out and, mysteriously embodied, haunted the shadows near her bed. But in the murky background other images floated sadly: a host of young faces set in the agonized mold of death. And she cried out to them in her restless dreams—"Pierre . . . Henri . . . what are you doing? . . . where are you?"

Then in the daytime there was always Germaine transfigured by hero-worship, talking and thinking only of Robert de Gency. Lorraine drew near to the girl, feeding hungrily on the ever-fresh romance that flowered so easily on crimson soil. And one day she asked Germaine:

"Are you never afraid . . . for him?"

With a rapt look Germaine answered,

"Nothing will ever happen to Robert. He is so brave!"

Lorraine sighed and turned away. But later when the loneliness became unbearable she went to the girl and told about the Pole, ending helplessly, "What do you think? Can I tell them? Should I not go and live my own life?"

Because Germaine loved, Lorraine hoped for the comfort one woman can give another. Moreover Germaine, though one of the Bourdon blood, could still speak with the voice of youth. And Lorraine, the older, stood blond and pale before the girl as before a judge.

Robert de Gency's picture, circled with the flag and flanked by flowers, looked on while Germaine turned a shocked face to her aunt.

"I don't see how you can love any one like that—especially now. A man who lives here and eats our bread. . . ."

"Very little bread," interposed Lorraine drearily.

Germaine borrowed the brisk, impatient inflections of her mother. The appeal had rendered her important and self-conscious.

"I love Robert because he is doing his duty as a patriot—the duty all men have to-day! You know that Papa would never hear of your marrying a stranger . . . an artist too . . . who is not ready to prove his love for France. Think of our brothers and Robert out there fighting, while any other man is safe! How can you?"

Lorraine humiliated herself further. She would have committed any servile act to hear from Germaine at that moment a comprehending word. And she argued:

"But he is an artist and belongs to a . . . different world of thought. He was very unhappy as a child, and there are political reasons why he should not have any sympathy with governments. Why should he risk his life for us? We have done nothing for him."

Rising dramatically, Germaine walked over to Robert de Gency's picture as if to include him in her answer.

"There is no excuse," she pronounced severely. "It isn't a question of governments: it's a question of ideals. And you, Aunt Lorraine, a Frenchwoman, a Bourdon by marriage, you can tolerate such cowardice?"

"He isn't a coward!"

"Any man who won't fight these barbarians is a coward." The young voice was uncompromising. "I have always respected you, Aunt Lorraine. And I know what love is. But who can love a man who is not with other men to-day? There is only one cause. Nothing else counts."

Lorraine swayed as if she had been hit. She fingered her moist handkerchief, staring unhappily at the accusing young creature, who, savoring her advantage, became condescending. "You had better not tell Mama and Papa. They would never forgive you. I don't know what they would say!" The Bourdon opinion, thus evoked, seemed to fill the room.

Lorraine moaned, "What can I do?"

Germaine took a step forward and advised in softened tones: "If he really loves you and you tell him to, he will enlist. And when the war is over, if you like, I will help you get the family's consent."

Lorraine looked at her with distracted eyes, "Enlist? Where?"

"There is always the Foreign Legion. It counts." Her voice rose to a pitch of exaltation. "Think how proud you will be, Aunt Lorraine. He must go if you tell him to. Of course I didn't have to tell Robert to go. But I suppose since your friend is a foreigner and an artist, it is a little different. It is your duty as a Frenchwoman to use your influence in the right way. Tell him you won't love him unless he goes. Tell him no woman to-day will look at a shirker. Once he has fought for our country he can think of marrying a Frenchwoman . . ."

Lorraine covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Germaine, if he should be killed! I should have sent him to his death. . . ."

"You would have taught him his duty,"

cried Germaine, with glistening eyes. "Yes, that is the only way."

"The only way?" murmured Lorraine, and shaken by the implacable verdict she sank into a chair weeping bitterly.

Germaine stood over her. "You ought not to cry if you love your country. I only cried once when Robert said good-by. Think, Aunt Lorraine! He can prove how much he loves you. And you will see him in uniform. Robert was so beautiful! That is the way a real man should be to-day."

And Lorraine, bowed and hopeless, saw the thing she must do if she wished to keep her self-respect. For the words of Germaine rang in her ears like the tolling of Fate. She could not help wondering if he loved her enough to go at her bidding. The question settled deep in her mind, deeper than her grief, and challenged her subtly to the test.

Shortly after the House of the Bourdons received a mortal blow. Raymond, the eldest son, was killed in action. It was as if the shell that had shattered him had rent the foundations of a stronghold, mangled the walls and left dazed, stricken creatures kneeling to hide their faces from God and man. And while they knelt, huddled against one another, their grief blended into a single image, came reverent hands to lay a flag over the wreckage and on it, as on an altar, to place a sword and a Croix de Guerre, which was all that was left of the Bourdons' son. The rest of him was strewn on the defended land with a neat grave stiffening in the tattered valley to remind friends and enemy that a fine man had fought his last battle.

Then the house was pierced by the dreadful screams of Louise in throes of childbirth. Men might die and men might conquer, cities split like nuts beneath a heel, churches crumble to ashes, but not all the groaning and vociferations of warring forces could alter the eternal mystery of creation, not all the united powers craving pardon for the harm done in the name of civilization could give back a father to the newly born.

The woman writhing on her bed, with sweating brow and glazed eyes, cried out like an agonizing animal. Her clamor was futile. The one she called and called would never answer anything again.

"Raymond . . . Raymond . . . what have they done to you? Help . . . help . . . Raymond, why did they kill you? . . . God, where is he? . . . Raymond, if such things happen to men I will not have a man child . . . I will not have a man child . . . They'll take him from me too. . . . Raymond . . . why, why, why, why . . .?"

Madame Jean Bourdon, decked in crêpe, stood rigidly beside the bed. Her lips moved as if a hand were laid over them smothering speech.

"Courage, my daughter. Raymond died for France."

But Louise Bourdon only moaned the more. "Poor France! . . . Poor Raymond! . . . Poor me!" And, in another paroxysm, she raved, "A flag! Bring me a flag to hold if I cannot have Raymond's hand!"

They brought her a flag, and with wild fingers she clutched it, closed upon it convulsively, shook it with the spasms that shook her tortured body. She crumpled it to her breast and wept over it, clinging to it as she would have clung to Raymond's hand.

In the darkened salon, surrounded by his household gods, sat Jean Bourdon, a weary old man. He sat before a little table upon which were placed a sword and a medal. His dull eyes never left these relics. He sat there immobile, while Louise Bourdon's shrieks rang through the house. His bushy beard brushing his chest, his chin sunk forward, his hands heavy on the arms of his chair, he sat through countless time keeping his vigil, brooding over ruins. But he made no sound.

The things about him dated the Bourdon history. They were rooted in the room like sturdy plants withstanding storms. There was the hearth, the favorite background for Raymond's vigorous bulk. How often he had straddled that familiar place, booming his opinions to the assembled family! The room was like a tomb enclosing memories of his loud good nature, his ready wit, his exuberant self-confidence.

Jean Bourdon saw his son striding beside him, a virile replica of his own pride; saw his son and partner beside him in the factory managing men with the magnetism that won obedience and efficiency; saw the House of Industry where the "lights of the heart," his great ovens, glowed like robust hearts, where the bricks that made the houses, that made the cities, that made the nations, multiplied to suit men's needs. He saw the wage-earners at their posts, forceful units of the world's production. He saw them working, he saw them paid, he saw them in their homes, husbands and fathers.

He saw his son Raymond looming, a colossus of the battlefield, with raised stained sword and lusty voice, urging his men on through hell to victory.

Quickened clods of native soil, they spring from fire to fire. Then in an awesome lull, when reddened clouds slink westward, over the plain gutted with life fluid, sprawl lacerated remnants of men and colored cloth. Crouching, stooping figures marked with the Red Cross go fumbling among the mangled stuff, ears strained for sign or groans, and pious hands rescuing relics. The deed is done! A bruised acre won to be lost again perhaps: and Raymond still forever . . .

Now through the silence of the house echoed Louise Bourdon's final scream of deliverance. Raymond's son was born. And down the hollowed cheeks of old Jean Bourdon from the very fount of his mute despair rolled lonely tears.

## VII

PIERRE wrote:

"When is man most genuine, Beloved? And what is heroism? Suppose that spurred by primitive rivalries, or caught in a climax of danger, the man responds electrically to a moment's madness, becomes a leader of men or saves an imperiled comrade, does that action establish forever his worth in society? Here men are often called heroes, who under abnormal pressure perform foolhardy deeds. I suspect them in ordinary life of being crude tyrants, close-fisted employers, petty climbers. When they are removed from excitement and the eyes of their comrades, will they sustain the heroic standard? Should they survive, perhaps their wives and partners will consider it a privilege to be browbeaten by them. I ask myself whether this training in heroism will give men a permanent advantage, whether it will sweeten homes, encourage spiritual aspirations, strengthen industry, or whether ruder methods of gaining an end, the will to conquer of the untrammeled male, will not destroy humanity! Questions—questions! I am made up of them. I shall never be a hero, Natalie. Do you mind? Glory disdains the plodder. Your letters save me. They lift me from the drudgery of killing, from this tiny area over which we see-saw, now up, now down. I could not keep my ideals from the bog if I could not dip them constantly in the pure fountain of your faith. What do we see here, hiding like animals behind our mounds? We do not even see our millions of brothers battling for the common cause. We only see ourselves, dust-grimed, unshaven creatures moved like pawns over a limited space of land. We seldom see the enemy. He probably resembles us in many ways, even though, as I must believe, he embodies a monstrous evil force, a gigantic destructive machine threatening future progress. The world is very small, beloved, from where I am. The sky is an ominous patch plastered over a festering wound in the earth. I need you to be my eyes, my ears, my inner voice. I need you to unloose my troubled gaze and point to spacious regions where sky and land in final harmony will one day frame the virtue of a united mankind. The map is cluttered with evil doers. I suppose we must destroy them in order that our descendants may delight in the world. Explain this to me, Natalie: Christ died to save mankind, but He never killed. . . .

"When men are herded together for an organized purpose, they become animals and philosophers. They adapt themselves to necessity and are easily led. It is just as well, is it not, Beloved? It is astonishing how much we can endure. We all must have our portion of sheep's blood along with the fiery liquid that makes good soldiers. And here the male thing is dominant. You ask me what is the male thing? I find it hard to answer. But if a woman such as you appeared suddenly among us we should feel and act like school boys caught in fault. Our manner would change. I should say we should remember our manners. We should all feel ill at ease until the readjustment. They are honest fellows. I love them well. And because I love them, sometimes I pity them. They have not a Natalie to keep the divine beacon lit. Though Heaven knows few need my pity. I cannot forget, as they do, the deeper issues at stake. I cannot forget the potential prosperity they represent, the hope of future international peace. Is the dream too beautiful? I cannot talk of these things here. They do not understand. They hate one race, and they believe that with the extinction of that race the problem will be solved. Can a race be extinguished, Natalie? If it is true that, with the crippling of one race, peace and good will can flourish in the rest of the world forever, then our hate for these people must be more than a local commotion. It must be a holy mission that binds us with other nations in the making of a World Empire. We must *conquer;* and then erase the word from our vocabulary. It is a dangerous word.

"They are honest fellows. I could name you a few who are dear to me. There is Lucien Nassaud, for example, as warm-hearted as freshly baked bread, and as naïve as a child. He is not handsome, poor Lucien! His face looks as if God had begun to mold it in a kindly humor and left off before it was finished, rather than wreak an interrupting mood of Heavenly irony upon a humble creature. Lucien's goodness multiplies like the loaves in the miracle. There is enough for every one. And when sometimes beneath the stars we find the heart to talk of home, he speaks simply of his old father and mother, modest loving people whose sole support he was. They are not rich. Lucien is an architect like his father. They two have worked together at little jobs that show the conscientious artisan. Our city is full of such dull, inconspicuous bits, that stand for earnest, unimaginative labor. Before the war Lucien was keeping up the business alone, that his father, after many years, might rest. But now the old father has taken on the yoke again, and every morning at seven, he is in his office struggling patiently over odds and ends that come his way, straining his tired eyes and urging on his trembling hands at the task of replacing his son. They never complain, though life is hard and there must be the constant fear in their hearts of losing their Lucien. They send him packages from time to time with little luxuries they can ill afford. I have seen Lucien's eyes grow wet when he receives one of these packages. He knows so well the cost. Everything he receives must be divided among his comrades. He is as generous as he is modest. He never hopes to rise above mediocrity. He has told me often how much the vision fails him. But is it mediocrity? I often think that the sweet kindliness of unpretentious minds contains beauty unknown to brilliant spirits. We need all sorts of builders to make a city. And Lucien has a distinct taste for beauty, an eager appreciation for summits he may never attain. He carries about a few postcards: pictures of Notre Dame, of the Parthenon, of the Taj Mahal. He says it makes him happy to know such things exist. And he tells me that he and his father used to spend their evenings studying a collection of such postcards, delighting in the monuments of the past, imagining treasures they might never see. Lucien's great dream has been a trip to Greece. He often says, 'If I am killed, I shall never have known Athens!'

"Then there is Brillaud de Granville, a young painter whose modern portraits amused the great ladies of his world. For him success was easily attained. He is a dark, ardent person with flippant speech that masks a dreamer. He dreads ridicule and, dissembling that dread, plays the fool to dodge the label of sentimentalist. He affects a skepticism concerning God and man. But one day I caught him kneeling in a wood, beside the body of his best friend.

And he was praying then. Another time I saw the look in his eyes when he handled our flag.

"Jean Lodec is a peasant. He has that grave serenity that comes to men who live close to earth. He sits for hours and stares at the tortured land over which we have fought and refought. He does not talk much. But once when I spoke of the harvest his heavy face lit suddenly and he told me of his farm, his orchards, his wife and children. 'They have not attacked my land,' he muttered; 'I would be better back there.' And his huge hands that are as sinewy as roots moved clumsily from his gun to point beyond the hills. Patient son of the soil, what fatality has brought him from his fields to join with other men in this destruction!

"These men and many others have for me a deep significance. They have changed for bayonets, perhaps forever, their compasses, their brushes, their hoes. Which is the best weapon? Their dreams are shelved. They are useful only in as much as they can endure and shoot straight. Yet I cannot see the remedy. . . .

"Oh, Beloved, they have fallen all about me, and I am still alive. Lucien Nassaud is dead. Brillaud de Granville is dead. Jean Lodec is dead, and so many others whose names you will never know. A surprise attack, repulsed, but at what cost! They say that men grow accustomed to death. Some do. I cannot. I try . . . but I cannot. Afterwards there is always the ghastly nausea, the faintness, the sick heart. And I count those who have gone and cannot measure the loss.

"Poor Lucien knew he would never come back, knew it several days ago with one of those mysterious instincts men learn to have out here. He gave me a little letter for his father. But Natalie, how can I bear to go to them and tell them how quickly it was done? What will become of them? What will become of all of us if this goes on? To have a comrade there beside you, a living, aspiring creature, linked by laws of kin to other creatures, to have heard his voice day after day, taken his hand and called him friend; and in an instant to see him a crushed, nameless thing with spilled brains and stilled heart!

"Brillaud will never paint again. Who will know what message he had to give? And Jean Lodec will never gather another harvest. The soil he nurtured has claimed him. And these are only three. What of the others with the unfinished tasks, the ungarnered dreams, the slaughtered genius! What of those who held locked in the fastness of their brain the secrets to come—of science, of art? The chain is being broken, Natalie, the chain that linked the past with the future, whose every ring enclosed knowledge. What research, what invention, what cures for evils may not be dying with the young thousands! . . . Tell me that nothing is irrevocable, that from the dust of crumbled dreams greater wisdom will arise to enlighten generations. Tell me that we are saving mankind in losing ourselves. The spoken words of the young dead may be written on the tablets, but, Natalie, who will ever know the embryonic secrets never told, the unborn melodies, the messages never to be delivered . . . all doomed with the broken shell that circled them. . . .

"Natalie, Natalie, they have written me. Raymond is dead. I cannot believe it. Raymond so strong, so sure of every thought and act, so vital! What will become of my father now? They say he died gloriously. Since he had to go, I am proud that it was with glory. But what is glory after all, Natalie? It cannot give life.

"The news has crushed my spirit . . . oh, only for a while. With you beside me I can face all things. But I remember when I was a boy how kind Raymond used to be. I was proud to be seen with him, especially when he wore the uniform of his Lycée, and walked among men even then as a man speaking their language. I remember how good-naturedly he laughed at me and my timid dreams. He was always the first in father's heart. And he is the first to go! Strange! My father wrote me a beautiful letter. He said, 'Your brother, our dear Raymond, died gloriously for his country. We are very proud of him. And a son, a second Raymond, has been born to avenge his father. God's will be done.'

"But, Natalie, the word 'avenge' has filled me with dread. This new baby will not be a man for many years. Must he then be brought to hate and kill, and must *his* son avenge him too? Then there is no end. If all the men of all the nations who die in this war must be avenged by their sons, there will be no rest in the world. I do not want to be avenged if I die, Natalie. Remember that. Do not let them avenge me."

Natalie answered:

"Pierre, they shall not avenge you, no, nor the other millions. Their sons and the sons of their sons will have other things to do, patch-ing up the world. There is a limit to evil. You are the sacrificed ones at the threshold of a new era. We are in the Dark Ages now, fighting as we believe for the salvation of men. It is a worthy cause. Raymond has died for it. But you will not die. You must not, you shall not.

"Pierre, here in the city the people wait and hope serenely for the end. I have grown to love the people as you loved Lucien Nassaud and Jean Lodec. They do not look farther than their homes. But each home has its humble shrine where women pray confidently. Their confidence must reach you. The blood of France is sweet, Pierre. From it will grow poppies and roses. And as the testament of any one who dies is sacred, why should not the will of the slain thousands be sacred! If they could tell us now, they would demand, in payment for their lives, future peace on earth. Peace would be their legacy.

"You are battling for many issues: for economic freedom, prosperity, the right to live.

The Governments tell us so. And they should know the stakes better than short-sighted citizens. They are showing us that culture must defeat false culture, that the enemy's God is not the real God, that this is a war of justice, not of conquest. France is bleeding generously, Belgium is bleeding pierced by the sword of conquest. What can they do but fight for their lives? These nations who are welded together are noble unselfish righters of wrong. They can have no ulterior motives. They would not send their sons out to die for vulgar gain. A long, long time ago—even in Napoleonic days—the aim was frankly conquest and power. But to-day, our social consciousness awakened, we can have no such backward purpose. We fight against the Imperial idea, which in our language is evil. Watch the socialists, Pierre: how quickly they have adapted themselves to the crisis. Surely had the leaders not been convinced that the workingman was fighting to protect his freedom, they would never have ranged themselves with capitalists, Kings and Presidents. Think of the Russian revolutionists who have declared a truce, who are in the ranks. All these have no profit in it. They work in cabinets and councils for the good of man. Among the Allies it is a reign of love, a disinterested co-operation against a common enemy. Some day when the smoke has cleared and the battle-grounds are healed we shall see and know what we have escaped. Meanwhile the people are being excellently cared for. You cannot imagine, Pierre dear, how kind every one is, how eager to help. Women who have always been sheltered from contact with the working classes, are now handling miseries as delicately as once they fingered chiffons. They too have little to gain in return for the time and strength they give to humanity. And then there are the humbler women, those whom I love, each ready with a sacrifice. We shall never hear of them when the war is over. But they will have given more than their portion. Do you see, my Pierre, how philosophical is the right half of the world in dealing with its problems, and what beauty emanates from this drama? Let your heart be great, even in mourning. You battle for civilization."

So did Natalie write. And her pen was dipped in bitterness.

## VIII

NOW indeed was the world in a sad way. The coil had loosened around the menaced city. A brilliant, desperate victory frustrated the enemy's design. But winter lifted its icy fist and shook it at the armies. Men wielded spades and dug holes to hide in. The women knitted faster. The factories of blood disgorged their products. And some men grew rich; and many grew poor. Scientists and economists worked hard upon the abiding questions of death and debt, while in their settled purpose uniforms crouched over the map with fixed murderous eyes and lofty motives. And the fair thoughts that beckon men to death, those cunning servitors of governments, flapped like so many little flags in men's brains: a nation's honor, liberty, duty to cause.

Oh, naïve instruments, Natalie thought, played by the clever fingers of the Powers!

Beloved little men, with big ideals, with slumbering common sense! The hymns that one day lull you to security awaken you the next to a ferocious exaltation, wherein the things you hold—the home, the field, the business of earning bread—crumble in your nervous fingers, while you listen to the tune the Piper plays. The instincts that make you godly trick you into such irrevocable deeds that ever afterwards your sons shall bear the brunt of your folly, and perhaps curse you for it.

"An enemy! An enemy! Bring me an enemy!" you shout as boys clamor for tin soldiers. The government, an indulgent parent, goes out and buys you one or two. And suddenly you are engaged in a game you did not bargain for. Enemies are more easily bought than wisdom. Then all your other playthings are destroyed: the puzzle of democracy, the mechanical toys of inventions, your picture books of funny laws, your farm houses and your doll houses, the merry-go-round where wealthy children ride proudly on the golden geese, the honest trading with your little neighbor.

Felix went to Natalie and said:

"Little comrade, is there anything you haven't told me? You're not the same girl lately. We used to talk things over, but now you never tell me anything. Are you just worried about Peter? Or have I hurt you in any way? Perhaps you think I'm not acting right? I know how much you respect Peter for what he's doing. I'll never forget how fine you were when he left. And I know what your letters mean to him now. You told Maxwell Clark a few things. You were pretty hard on him, but I guess you didn't mean most of them. . . . Look here, Natalie, you and I have always been pals. And I want you to speak out straight to me. I wonder if you haven't held it up against me because I haven't done my part with the others. Perhaps I'm a coward. I'd hate to fight. I don't see how Peter stands it. But I don't want to be a shirker. What do you say, old girl? Hadn't I better enlist?" He stood before her much as Pierre had done. His honest face was set in a stern mold with inquiring eyes and salient jaw.

"These fellows are great," he went on, lowering his gaze. "I'm almost ashamed when I pass them on the street. What do you suppose they think of me—a hulking mass of flesh and bones just as fit as they are, if not fitter, hanging around here fiddling with architecture, while they get shot to hell? I thought I'd talk it over with you first. But it's been on my mind. And perhaps you've been thinking of it too. If I go in I'm going hard. It won't be any easy job for me, you understand." His eyes rested in a moment's longing upon the scattered drawings.

Then Natalie, who had stayed rigidly listening to his halting words, stretched out her hands with a passionate motion.

"Felix . . . you too?" The cry broke from her with such violence that he turned short.

Natalie had sunk into a chair, her hand shielding her eyes. Her huddled figure expressed despair. Felix reached her with a stride.

"I didn't know you'd take it this way."

"Wait . . . wait," she whispered.

His kind hand on her shoulder seemed heavier than any weight. It pressed her down into the regions where only one may go at a time. She heard his voice groping uncertainly with the phrases she had grown to dread.

"We all agree that it's an unholy mess. But what's a man to do? Why should I be spared? These chaps don't want to fight any more than I do. But they know they've got to win. Isn't it a world-job—for every one? How am I different from them?"

She murmured, "But this isn't your country."

"They may be attacking our country next unless they're stopped," he cried in a strong voice. "You can't tell what they'll do."

She was thinking that she was a poor creature nipped between the thumb and forefinger of a grinning monster and dangled over a pit. She struggled to escape from the monster's grin. And there was Felix saying earnestly, "You'd care a lot more about me if I went. Now . . . wouldn't you?"

But then Natalie found the strength to break the paralyzing spell. She sprang to her feet.

"I would *not!*" The parry was sudden. His hand dropped to his side. Perplexity tied his features into a comic knot.

"I would not," she repeated energetically, and with recovered speech found a desperate alertness. "Felix, don't be a fool!" She brushed aside his stammered rejoinder and motioned to a chair. "Sit down and listen to me." He obeyed her.

Then bracing herself for an effort Natalie began:

"Felix, you and I are babes in a burning wood. Unless we keep our wits and judgment clear we'll be destroyed. We can't alter the course of events to-day. A few people have tried and they have been called traitors. The time for free speech has passed. War has its prescribed vocabulary. And leaders entrench themselves behind it, if they wish to remain leaders. But when I see you standing under a burning tree, crying out that there's a boa-constrictor living in the wood and that it must be got rid of, I'm willing to bet that, while you catch on fire, the boa-constrictor is sneaking from the dangerous place and crawling off to other hunting grounds. World-violence has as many skins as a snake, and changes them as often. It is the Hydra of Civilization. But we have still to discover how to rid the world of it once and for all. The throned tyrant is only one head, the munition maker is another. And there are thousands of heads!" She gave him a moment to answer, but he nibbled at his pipe and watched her with troubled eyes.

Her voice grew gentle. "Felix, why do you want to go? Because you are a man? Look squarely into your motives. Your vanity is perhaps at stake. You are ashamed, you say, to pass a soldier on the street. I wonder if he isn't often envying you. But suppose he is despising you? Will you be driven by fear of his disdain into a uniform?"

"Give me credit for some decency!" protested Felix.

She accorded it, continuing, "Well, then, eliminate any suggestion of human weakness. You believe that Imperialism must be defeated. So do I. You believe that war is an effective remedy? I do not. Look farther than the present struggle . . . if you can. Look at the education of children, the increased armies and navies, the readjusted map, the watchful eyes of nations each glistening on a neighbor's gain, vowing friendship while they scheme and hunt for profit. Where you find it, there you will find the causes for future Imperialism. Look closely at your own country, Felix. We are young. Our history is in the making. And a hydra-head is quickly grown. What are the capitalists doing to-day? Where is there profit for some of them? Don't forget it is in war; but not the greatest war of all, the war of Democracy. They could not sell munitions to strikers, or lend vast sums to the people. But they can feed the cannons for a price, and buy the products of their land, reselling them as they see fit, and they can tinker with conquered colonies. You prate of enemies . . . attacks! The enemy is within our gates, snugly hidden behind his purpose. It does not need a uniform to sniff him out . . . It is noble to give your life for a cause. But when all the lives of honest men are given, the monster will still survive. France is a sublime martyr. Germany to-day is the hydra-head. But when that head is severed, another will grow. Then what? Not until united races break their sword and starve the monster while they feed themselves will there be a useful victory. What am I saying? It comes to nothing!" Her gestures demolished theories. She turned away wearily, as if she had defeated her own ends in defending them.

But Felix questioned in a dull voice, "What's to be done then?"

"Nothing! This may be the prelude to an ended world," she said with a faint smile.

He jumped to his feet and started pacing the studio, flinging at her, "What's got into you, Natalie? You're beyond me. Why didn't you talk this way to Peter?"

She took the question squarely, shooting an answer, "Because it would have killed his faith in everything." Then with renewed vigor she burst out. "Can't you see how helpless I am? I who love this country and love Pierre, I can save neither! Their fate is joined. I mean to speak of nations, not of a nation—of races, not of a race—of people, not of one creature. For when I speak of France and Pierre my heart is sick. The valiant little men, the patient women, represent to me the tragic romance of the world. Their tortured land is stricken, their homes are emptied, and their spirit remains unquenchable. In the whole dreary drama of our epoch, where loss wears the same mask, my love mourns most over the bitter red river that carries the blood of France to the great ocean where all blood is merged." She shivered as if an icy wind had touched her; then she stretched out her arms to Felix. "But you! You must be saved for saner work. You must be brave enough not to kill, wise enough not to be killed. I tell you there must be men left to build the houses, till the fields, to uphold the wage-earners, to sing the songs of labor and creation. There must be some youth left to dream of dawns and sunsets, of suns and moons, of happy things. The stalwart sons of our mothers would do well to stay at home and offer their health and brains to better service than that of the cannon. Now I have no more to say. You can go or stay as you see fit."

Felix turned his back on her and stood a long while staring out at the roofs. She sat as if she had forgotten him, as if she had forgotten all things and had finished her work of living. Her mind was white as an unwritten sheet.

Finally he moved. He came over and knelt beside her, encircling her with his arms. His voice was choked.

“‘I won’t go, Natalie . . . I won’t go.” He repeated it over and over again, clinging to her like a child. And without joy she held him, murmuring his name as if she were calling some one else.

# IX

NATALIE was alone when Lorraine came to her.

It was late afternoon. The houses of the city were huddled one against the other, their stony faces veiled by the long shadows, like women waiting for their widowhood. The bells of St. Germain sounded deep as they rang a dusky hour. Against the darker horizon hung clouds like lurid flowers burst from the cannon's seed. On the silent balcony where Natalie stood staring out, the solemn essence of the twilight had gathered the last lingering scents of summer, and a haunting sadness that seemed to have traveled from afar.

Natalie's melancholy was broken by a wild knocking at the door. And when with startled haste she went to open, she found Lorraine swathed in crêpe, a haggard woman whose ravaged face bore fresh marks of tears. Her blond hair framed her with indifferent shine. Her black-gloved hands went out to Natalie as she swayed forward.

Natalie gave a little cry.

"Pierre . . . ?"

But Lorraine shook her head, and with uncertain steps reached the couch, muttering incoherent words. "He's gone . . . I sent him . . . But she said it was the only way . . . and now he hates me. Oh, my God, it's my fault! I had to come to you . . . you're the only one. . . ."

Natalie stood over her anxious and perplexed, her own heart slowly resuming its normal beat.

"Tell me, dear Lorraine, what is it? Have you lost any one?"

"Oh, yes . . . oh, yes!"

"You poor, poor thing. Has . . . another of Pierre's brothers been killed?"

"No." She looked up at Natalie pitifully. The light was washed from her eyes. Her hands fumbled with the folds of her heavy veil.

She did not seem strong enough to support the weight of the crêpe.

Natalie sat down beside her.

"Now tell me."

Then with an effort at control that contracted her body into a rigid pose, Lorraine began, and each word was like a lonely thing groping its way.

"I love some one . . . he's a Polish sculptor. He . . . when this war broke out, he never thought of going. There were political reasons, and he was not made . . . to fight. I understood at first. No one has ever done anything for him to help him along. He is very poor. Why should he fight for them?" her voice sank to a whisper.

"Well?" said Natalie gently.

"Well, soon I felt ashamed. When all the Bourdon men went off, it seemed . . . a reproach. They would have despised me for loving a man who was not doing his share. I didn't dare tell them. I didn't dare be happy. I thought of you and Pierre. And it shamed me to think that you, a stranger, were giving all that you had dearest to France, that you were so noble and convinced of the worth of sacrifice, while I, a Frenchwoman, was a coward. Oh, Natalie, what must you think of me?" She bowed her head. Her voice went on in dreadful monotony. "I saw the other women in mourning . . . I saw the wounded men . . . and the dead. I knew the country was in danger. And all this time there was Sacha, half starving, but . . . safe, working, dreaming, loving me. I was afraid to come to you. But I had to go to some one, as I was in such a state. So I asked Germaine. She is engaged, you know, to Robert de Gency. She is young. She loves too. I thought she would clear my conscience for me and tell me to be glad because he was safe. But she judged me severely. Oh, she was merciless!"

Natalie put a hand on Lorraine's knee. "I wish I had known." Shadows crept across the studio floor, touching Lorraine's crêpe with furtive fingers.

"She said he ought to go. She said he must go if he loved me. And I listened to her . . . It seemed the only way!" she wailed in sudden anguish. "Then I wondered if he really cared enough for me to make this sacrifice for me and for my country. I doubted him . . . I doubted myself. It was horrible. When Raymond was killed Germaine came to me. I never thought she could be so pitiless. She told me if I could go on loving a man who was not doing his duty that she would consider me disloyal to them all, disloyal to Raymond's memory, and that she would tell the family. I could not have stood that. Every night I dreamed of Raymond and Pierre . . . and all the others. At last I went to Sacha."

"You went to send him out?" asked Natalie in a low voice.

She nodded. For a moment she could not speak. Dusk stole into the room, enveloping them with its quiet mist. Lorraine's pale face shone out like a lost, wilted flower drifting on turgid waters.

"I shall never forget that day. It was yesterday. I shall never forget until I die. Germaine took me to his door and left me there. I told him quickly. I was standing beside a big figure of the Christ he has been working on ever since the war broke out. I remember it towered above me. And I remember the feel of the damp clay once when I touched it . . . it was clammy as a corpse. I told him quickly that I must give him up unless he enlisted. I told him . . . I could not love a coward." Her voice rose to a shriek. "Oh, God, I shall never forget him! He didn't move while I talked. But his eyes lost all their dreams, all their hope, and blazed at me—as if a furnace lit within him were burning everything I threw into it. He looked so deeply and so fiercely at my poor naked soul that I felt it shriveling up. Yet I went on. His face was white. His beard flamed from it like a red banner. When I had finished, he said, 'Is this your last word?' Then it was too late. I thought of them: of Raymond, Germaine . . . and you and Pierre.

And I answered that it was. He strode over to me and seized my wrists so brutally that I could not move. And he said in a voice that I can never forget, 'Yes, I will go. But I will not go because I love you, but because you have killed love. I will go and you will never see me again. I shall never come back. You have taught me enough now what life is worth!' . . . I was afraid of him and tried to get away. But he held me fast. 'You are a coward,' he said and laughed as I have never heard a man laugh. 'You put a fine price on your love. You bargain well. And I who believed that on this earth there still remained a remnant of the spirit of Christ, I who trusted in you, I have been a fool. Yes, I will go. But I go hating man . . . all men . . . and such women as you.' " Lorraine covered her face with her hands and began weeping. "Then he turned and put his shoulder to the figure of the Christ and pushed. I saw the veins in his neck bulge out. I heard him breathe like a man who has been running. Then I saw the thing topple and crash down. Oh, the noise! It broke a little vase of flowers. I remember he stepped on a rose that rolled to his feet. And it dragged chairs and the table over with it and lay face downwards in a litter of stuff. He pointed to it still laughing. 'That's what you've done. Now go!' I went on my knees, Natalie. I prayed and begged him to forgive me. But I was afraid of him. He told me if I did not go at once he would kill me. So I left him. Now it is all over. He will never, never come back."

"You did this?" said Natalie in a hushed voice. Lorraine threw her arms around the younger woman's neck. "Oh, help me . . . . help me. You are the only one who will understand. You will think I was right, won't you? You would have done the same. I shall go mad unless you help me."

Natalie wrenched herself free. "You have done a dreadful thing," she said.

Lorraine collapsed on the couch, sobbing frantically. But Natalie stood before her cold and stern, staring down at the crumpled mourning.

"You have done a dreadful thing."

"You say that?" came from Lorraine in broken sounds.

"You listened to Germaine, that romantic child? You took your love and threw it away because you were not brave enough to keep it! Oh, Lorraine, how could you? You sent a man out to die because you were afraid to let him live! Oh, Lorraine! You dared go to a man and say, 'If you love me, go out and take a gun and kill.' You deserve the suffering that must be yours to the end of your life. You deserve it." She saw the fallen Christ, the red-bearded artist standing among the ruins; she saw deep into his outraged heart. And her anger sank to pity. She looked sadly at Lorraine: "What have you done?"

And in a sudden shriek that tore through the gathering darkness Lorraine answered: "You tell me that, Natalie? . . . You? I had put all my faith in you! I know what your love has made of Pierre. I know what Pierre was the night before he left. And I know what he was after you had talked to him that morning. He has written me how you inspire him. How can you condemn me?"

Natalie thrust out her hand as if to protect herself. But Lorraine, raising herself on her elbow, her tear-stained face contracted in a passion of despair, raved on:

"He's gone. Yes, I sent him! But all the other women were sending their men. You sent yours!"

"I never sent Pierre."

"No, but you believed that he had to go. And if he had failed, you would not have loved him as much. I saw your face when he said good-by."

Then Natalie dropped on her knees before Lorraine, and hid her face in the limp veil. The crêpe smelt of musty, dead things. The stale odor mounted through her nostrils and filled her being with a sense of suffocation. Deep in the dark behind her closed lids glimmered awful visions of men with blazing eyes and men with tragic eyes and open wounds and pale upraised hands pointing . . .

Lorraine's sobs strangled and ceased. The room was profoundly quiet and dark. And the bells of Saint-Germain rang as if they would never stop, as if their voices must reach the ends of the earth awaking sleepers. They told men that there was no way of escaping fate. They told women that there was no use in weeping.

The two women lay immobile in the gloom. At last Natalie raised her head.

"Poor Lorraine," she murmured.

Lorraine's hand crept out and found a friend's hand ready.

"Poor Natalie."

So clasping each other's hands as if the human contact saved them they clung a while longer, each separate in her hopeless introspection. What had been broken could never be mended.

"He will not come back," Lorraine whispered once.

"No, he will not come back."

"Do you think he will forgive me?"

"Yes."

"What have I done?"

Natalie answered: "What have we all done?"

"You have Pierre."

"Yes, I have Pierre. But he may never come back."

"At least he will have loved you."

"I would rather he lived."

"He will live, Natalie. I know he will live."

They wept in one another's arms.

Pierre wrote:

"I don't know why, Beloved, but I am happy to-day. I have not been so happy for a long time. Or perhaps it is that I am quiet, because there is so much death around me. There are men here who have learned to hate, and men who will never know how to hate. They are the saddest of all, because they kill the enemy pitying the man. But it is not to talk of war that I write you now. Last night I was on watch. The feeling of the Thing was there. I knew it stalked close by, with squinting eye and cocked gun ready to reach the heart. The Hunter hunted. But the universe repudiated him. Like a grave parent who rebukes an erring son, not with angry words but with majestic disdain of indifference, the earth withdrew in a stately secrecy. The sky had receded until it no longer seemed to cover us, but stretched unattainable, remote, an Elysian field flowered with gold, beyond the reach of our reddened feet. The land was mute and cold and scentless, as if it had locked in its being, out of sight or touch of man, all its life-giving fruits. The withered silhouettes of trees were skeletons from which the spirit has gone. And we were left to forge over a frozen surface unchided and unloved.

"But I found peace in this awesome solitude. You will understand, Beloved, when I tell you that the link between me and God, between me and man, slackened until I no longer felt kinship with either. And there alone, I was a tiny machine ticking away a mindless record of a thing called life, without regret or desire. Had a bullet found me then I should have fallen passively, satisfied to lie unburied on the calm surface of the universe. I thought how strange it was that man has two eyes, two ears, two arms and legs, but only one heart. I was as solitary and unique as my heart and would have ended with it, a perishable image of a deathless God.

"Natalie, the entity that is me, that is Pierre masquerading in a uniform, can never solve the riddle, or change the world, or quicken the dead, or save himself.

"To-night we have a night attack. What will the night say? And will the stars draw nearer to match with the cannon's glare or will they be so many closed eyes, masked, that they may not see our deeds? Adieu, Beloved."

## X

NEWS came to Natalie that Pierre was badly wounded and had been sent to a hospital in the city.

Then there were terrible days.

Felix, awkwardly tender in his solicitude, and pale, tragic Lorraine circled about her dispensing comfort. But Natalie did not need their comfort. She had a refrain of her own—"He will get well . . . he will get well." And in this reiteration she found a surer message than in all their cautious words. Deep in her heart she felt relief: such a relief as she could not share with any one. The broken thing was well out of it, with still a spark of life to do the mending. And now he could not die. She willed his spirit to conquer tortured flesh during the grim weeks when she might not even see him. She sent her thought driving through space to reach his bedside and keep a sleepless vigil. Things and people moved about her with vague silhouettes and vaguer voices. She saw and heard realities as if they were figments of dull dreams. She knew only one thing: that Pierre no longer stood in the crimson trenches, a target for the enemy. The jealous egoism of the lover blotted out all other issues but the fate of this one love. Fighting millions might fill the universe with their uproar, if their din spared that high, thin line upon which Pierre lay struggling with mortality. Let them fight! Let them tear the earth to pieces and put it together again. The armies no longer wore Pierre's face. They were poor strangers marked and doomed. His return from the treacherous regions was omen enough of his destiny. He would survive.

Then one day when the slender thread that held his spirit to the shell was at the snapping point, and Natalie knelt at the narrow gateway through which he might soon pass never to return, a blighting sense of her selfishness came upon her. And she was ashamed because in her supreme confidence she had presumed to separate Pierre from his agonizing comrades. If he died or lived he was after all no more than a blade of grass before the relentless thresher. The red plain was thick with such as he. She prayed that he might live, vowing her vision to a broader consciousness of issues should he be spared. The immense drama included him and herself. She could not map out her peace of mind upon her private hopes. Should he go or stay, the questions depending on his course were farther reaching than one man saved or lost. Or so Natalie came to believe as she struggled with the problems that confronted her.

The crisis passed in his favor. Still secluded on the misty island of pain where she might not follow him, he could not see or know her for many weeks. She was left to beckon his weak spirit back to the main shore without hearing his answer. But she was left also to hear the unquelled thunder of sullen forces battling for supremacy. And because Pierre was mercifully removed from the iron ranks that held the land, because one battered soldier was taken from the masses, the unleashed violence of men was none the less ready to worry and to maul the things they had once prized.

She felt that Pierre's need of her would emerge from this trial, more urgent than ever. And again she faced the fear that he might see in her unquiet spirit a reflection of his own. She grew to dread the meeting, when with yearning eyes he would probe the happy shallows and go deeper towards the dark places, where the lie, such as it was, lay enshrined. If in discovering it, he found himself, the creed he had built up on her assurances would crack and fall, leaving him dismayed among his broken gods. He would have fought and lost for nothing. And their love, the prop, would have received a mortal blow. Yet try as she would, she could not believe that a single death could bring about the miracle of a regenerated humanity. She had told Pierre that there was beauty in a bloody cause, and that all the youth of his martyred country would by their sacrifice save civilization. She had humored his illusion, calling it nobler names. Now he was back, and if there were to be a reckoning, his faith would be at stake.

Then came the day she had been waiting for, when that beloved heart took courage, and the frail spark burned higher, lighting the mind. And Lorraine, smiling for the first time in many weeks, said to her:

"You can see Pierre to-day. He's asking for you. I have arranged things so that he will be alone. The family have worn him out. Now he needs you."

Natalie prepared tremulously for the visit, and she was beautiful. The grace of early Spring was in her eyes. She wore her joy mysteriously, but it gleamed from the bright curve of her lips, through the pallor of her face, infusing a faint pink into her cheeks. It flowed from the dusky mass of her hair down the long nervous lines of her body. It transformed her into a sentient creature freed temporarily from the strain that had so long drained her vitality.

She carried a great armful of narcissus. Their milky blossoms sang of fields and of blue sky. They discoursed in perfumes of love, and life, and beauty, ignoring the mid-winter chill that could not freeze their purity.

And as she passed the women on the street, she would have flung her happiness at them, as a child tosses a rose to a friendly stranger. She lived the moment passionately, for once without an intruding doubt. But when she reached the House of Pain she faltered in her swift winging, a quick clutch at her heart. There in the white domain of steel instruments the air was laden with unfamiliar smells. In discreet corners a daub of red betrayed a cast off bandage. A glimpse of white figures hastening on their way, a keen passing glance from a bearded doctor, a sense of shrouded expectation, brought her sudden consciousness of hovering danger held at bay. She climbed the stairs hugging her narcissus, to the door that separated her from Pierre. And there the gentle nurse left her, telling her to knock and enter.

She paused to breathe, then, with a steady hand, knocked. And the voice that had said good-by eternities ago answered her. She stood in the little room. She saw as through a mist the face on the pillow, and stumbled forward, her milky blossoms dropping on the white spread.

"Pierre!"

"Natalie!"

His hand was safe within hers, held as one holds a treasure never to be released. The weaker fingers nestled in her palm. She looked into the dear wasted face, where hollows dug by the grim sculptor lay between the salient bones, and where like freshly lit torches the eyes burned into hers their wordless gratitude. And in the imperceptible hush that followed their first greeting she found her Pierre. The little smile of parting was still there, moored to his lips. His voice, as she had imagined it, traveling from the past, reached her.

"Beloved, is it you? . . . really you?"

"It is really me."

"It has been so long!"

"Too long!"

"I thought I should never see you again. How beautiful you are! Natalie, you are beautiful." He touched the blossoms. "And these! . . . You remember that I loved them!"

"Oh, Pierre!"

"I have so much to tell you. Your letters, Beloved . . . you will never know what they meant to me."

"Brave Peter the Knight."

His voice rose to a troubled note. "But I'm not brave, Natalie. I must tell you that I'm not brave." And now she saw strange ghosts brooding in his eyes, things that had not been there before. She saw the bandaged head, the bandaged shoulder, and the long still outlines of his body beneath the covering. She would have cried out then—"Oh, Pierre, what have they done to you?" But the gladness in his face arrested her.

And she waited to unburden her heart.

Then, as if he were afraid that he would not have time to tell her all he had to say, he began to speak quickly. He looked to her with mystic expectancy, and his eyes were filled with yearning.

"Beloved, you remember my last letter to you? I told you I was happy. But I did not tell you why. I was happy because I knew that night was the last for me . . . out there. I was so tired. I had given all I could." The clasp of his fingers tightened around hers. "Without you, I could not have given so much. I didn't want to fail you. Listen, Natalie, and try not to despise me. Towards the end I felt so useless. I was there with the others doing all I could . . . but it was not enough. The men I loved the best died giving more. You remember poor old Nassaud?" he said in a sad voice.

She nodded, stroking his hand.

"Well, they were such fine fellows. And I kept wondering if their death had settled anything. I couldn't get accustomed to the fighting. The noise and the stench of it sickened me. The waiting in the trenches with life reduced to its elemental instincts—that was the hardest. Our point of view was limited to the tiny area stretched between ourselves and them. There seemed nothing left of the rest of the world. Only your letters told me of the big cause . . ." His voice trailed off, then he resumed: "The Germans were nothing but men as bored with it all as we were. One day we took a prisoner, and when he talked, it was as if he were taking words out of our mouths. Strange that an enemy should speak our language! But of course I knew that between the men and the Idea of evil there was a world. Our spirits were at war . . . our bodies paid. We had to kill them . . . we had to . . ." He made a wild movement, winced with pain, and sank back among the pillows.

"Be quiet, Pierre," she soothed.

But red spots glowed on his cheeks; his hands trembled in hers. "The fate of the world depended on us. Didn't it? I thought it all out . . . some day I'll tell you. Men were the pawns. But I was too tired that night even to be a pawn. When I . . . climbed out of the trench, I thought I'd go running straight ahead, and I prayed to God, Natalie, that I should drop. I had my bayonet ready. I held it as if it were your hand. It would have stabbed the first man in my way. The sky, the earth were on fire. The whistle and the screech of shells . . . the madness . . . the night, the dripping blood and smoke, and I a lonely desperate soul racing through it, stumbling over bodies, crying aloud, 'God, God, God!' as I ran. I think I killed once. I didn't seem to be touching earth or to be . . . the thing called man. The evil of hell was on us . . . In all the raging, awful place there wasn't one sane eye, one lucid brain. Then, it was as if I were suddenly forced into sleep, violently thrust into unconsciousness. . . . I don't remember. . . . Only long afterwards I woke to dreadful pain and saw a dead German's face close to mine, twisted in a petrified scream of hate. And around his neck hung a locket with a picture of three children in it. His . . . legs were torn off."

"Don't!" broke from Natalie, and she covered her eyes.

"Forgive me . . . I wanted you to know . . . I was not brave. I fainted then. They must have found me." Little beads of sweat stood out on his forehead beneath the rim of his bandage. He tried to smile, but there was no more strength left in him.

"You shouldn't . . . you shouldn't remember," groaned Natalie.

"Beloved, did I do my duty?"

"Yes, you did your duty . . . and it's over."

He closed his eyes, as if she had told him what he wanted most to hear. She thought he was asleep and sat very still, holding his damp hand.

It was over then. He was back from the awful sunless land. He had not forgotten to smile or to call her his beloved. But his mind was a fragile, sick thing that must be coaxed back to health. She saw the things she would have to do if she wished to save the faith he had kept immaculate for her sake. More than ever she must uphold him, keep him from the horror and despair that filled her own heart. She would talk to him of beauty. She would preach life and joy. She would make him and herself forget. For they had earned their peace.

She saw his lips move and bent closer.

"Speak to me, Beloved . . . Tell me about the city. It is so long . . ."

She began as if she were telling a fairy story. "The city is a soft gray. Even the stones look gray as if they were made of mist. The gardens have deep purple places, rich as plums, where dreamers go and listen for the Spring. The Seine is the color of crushed grapes. It flows slowly . . . so slowly beneath the bridges, as if it were carrying heavy secrets tangled in the hidden currents like dark fish in nets. And all along the Quais old women sell old brown books. The streets are gray and often glisten with wet. But on the corners flower-stalls like little fires spring up to warm the heart, and there we find the violets, tulips colored like parrakeets, daffodils and narcissus . . . friends whose faces always smile at some approaching summer. And next to them squats the chestnut-man roasting chestnuts all day long. The air is full of spicy roast and burning charcoal. Then there are the oranges! Can you see them in the winter twilight? They burst out from the dusk like little balls of gold . . . a heaped treasure guarded by an old fairy godmother. Some of them wear funny peaked caps. They tell us of fruit trees far away in sun-soaked lands. They make us think of southern seas as blue as jewels. And the old fairy godmother sits and nods beside the oranges. Any one could steal her treasure." Her voice grew singsong like a lullaby.

Pierre said drowsily, "Tell me more . . . I like to hear . . . you . . ." She went on—"People of all kinds hurry through the streets, so quickly you can hardly see their eyes. Each has something to do more important than anything else. They are telling themselves fairy tales from morning to night. The pretty woman is thinking that no other woman is as pretty, that the new dress she has ordered will be the loveliest dress in the city, that her lover will tell her all her life how beautiful she is. The young man is thinking that he will pass his examinations and be famous very soon and wear a decoration. All the women will want him to love them. But he will not be so easily caught. The stout, pompous man with the red ribbon in his buttonhole is thinking that surely he will be made a minister before he dies, or that he has invested his fortune with astonishing foresight, or that his wines are better than any others, or that he can really not afford to know So-and-So. The mothers are thinking that their children are the most beautiful and the most brilliant creatures of their generation, that they will be Princesses and Generals and Presidents. All these people pass and pass one another on the streets, thinking how clever, how good, how wise they are." She ended in a whisper.

The little wrinkles and lines in Pierre's face were smoothed out. He lay breathing quietly, the hand in hers relaxed. She lifted it as if it were a fragile thing and put it on the bed. He stirred but did not wake. He looked like a young monk after a long fast. His thin upraised face was whiter than the circling bandages, and infinitely pure with an ascetic grace that softened angles and hollows.

As Natalie studied him her tears brimmed over as from a full cup, rolling silently down her cheeks. She wept to find him so gentle, so resigned. If he were as men were meant to be, then other men were miserable examples of a distorted humanity. But he was rare, and could never fit his wistful spirit to flagrant crudities. Then what must be his fate?

The state of men was savage, covered thinly by a decent disguise. Their deeds sprang from primeval instincts, deformed by scheming brains. In cycles to come she saw them still battling for illusions, felling one another with prodigious weapons yet to be invented, squabbling over the earth that so often confuted their cunning arguments. Children of nature . . . yes: but nature that took no account of season, nature that warred eternally with harmony. What were they after? What did they want? She saw their goodness thwarted, their wickedness extolled. She saw dreamers snared and simple souls confused. The lumbering mass that flapped and squirmed over disputed ground, squeaking their puny ambitions to a patient God, could never resolve the gigantic problems risen from their megalomania. Was man to be forever the enemy of man until through centuries of slaughter and weakening, in dwindling hosts, they reached the end, where the two last mortals, debilitated remnants of proud races, stood glaring at one another across a last frontier: Cain and Abel torn with savage rivalry over the last illusion, there to meet and grapple murderously!

The present talk of nations was fine and promising. It rolled in victorious nouns from mouth to mouth, it swelled in alien languages from pole to pole, changing its accent to suit a race. Economists computed while populations fought. And the result was sullied money and dead men. The Christ idea haunted choked cathedrals, seeking a disciple among the kneeling crêpe. But Christ had ceased to be a practical Master. He was the gentle Consoler who had died in vain to save mankind. Suffering was His message, and their excuse.

Pierre woke to break the melancholy reflections of his Natalie, and to melt her with his smile.

"You've cured me already," he said in a stronger voice. And everything forgotten but his need of her, she turned a recovered radiance full upon him.

## XI

PIERRE was back in the House of the Bourdons. Then began his convalescence. But all was not as before. Seven tragic months had passed between his going and his return. And his homecoming was not as he had imagined it. The Bourdons applied themselves to a strict observance of national disaster, including death and financial loss. They were ready for any sacrifice if in the making of it they could uphold a patriotic standard. When Pierre was wounded they considered they had made a just donation to France. They had given only one son. They would give another if it were necessary.

Pierre was in no mood to play the martial hero. But he felt constrained to take the cue. He had never resisted their wishes, much less so now when the shadow of mourning was upon the house. He was grateful to them also for their efforts to surround him with every care and consideration, though their assiduous attendance too often interfered with his freedom. He felt them, in an inarticulate way, striving to express their pride in him. He would have told them how unwarranted their pride was, but feared to hurt them deeply; and they had grown old since Raymond's death, though they would not have acknowledged it. With his son Pierre's return, Jean Bourdon found again the booming notes of confidence, the stiff carriage of his shoulders, the rounded chest and assured gestures that ranked him as head of the House. Madame Bourdon loosened the pinched lines around her lips, relaxed the devout resignation of her manner, resumed a brisk show of competency. But Pierre saw that they were only mimicking their broken selves, replacing vanished personalities by a fictitious display of optimism. And his heart was sad.

He wanted to talk to them of Natalie. When he mentioned her, however, he encountered sudden reserve. It was as if he had introduced a stranger, without regard for their feelings, into the closed circle of their mourning. He was disconcerted by the unspoken rebuke and not yet strong enough to argue with them. But Lorraine, to whom he went at last for advice, said with a cheerless little smile, "Wait, dear Pierre, before you speak to them. They are not ready. . . . See your Natalie as often as you can, and then some day when you are stronger, go to them and tell them your plans. . . . Not now."

Pierre thought that she was wise. They were not ready, and he dreaded giving them more pain. But he suffered from this thing that lay between them, and he was only happy when he could be with Natalie.

The first weeks he could not often escape from the family. He felt the habit of duty towards them, and he knew what they expected of him. Germaine hung about him, volubly affectionate, disserting on her unique theme: Robert de Gency's perfection. The children, Jean Paul, Henri and Rose Marie, wide-eyed, timid, stared at their wounded uncle until, their awe dissipated, they filled the rooms with noisy mimic warfare for his benefit. Grandmother Bourdon accepted his presence as one of the unquestioned events in her shriveling world, where sight and sound were failing, and young faces were reflections of a ghostly past. Only Louise Bourdon, an absorbed joyless mother, nursed her newly born with blank side-glances at intruders. She barely acknowledged Pierre's return. It was as if, with Raymond's going, a nerve had snapped, disconnecting her with the rest of the world. She lived in twilight.

Lorraine, carrying her incurable regret like a secret disease, served Pierre as if she loved him but could not share her pain with him or any man. At his first question she had answered briefly, "He's gone," and would say no more. But Germaine told Pierre a version of the story, and Pierre was infinitely tender to Lorraine afterwards.

Sometimes at night, when he had not seen Natalie during the day, he would write her, because he was very lonely and only she could understand. "I should be happy, Beloved," he wrote, "I am getting well. To-day I could lift my arm higher than yesterday. I feel life renewing, as if the fountain, clear of all impurities, lifted me on its sunny jet. And in my heart the birds who used to sing are singing fresh songs. Youth is like a beautiful day. The body partakes of its delight, even when the mind remains aloof, sharpened by some private sorrow. My physical sensations are numberless. The homely details of living have become great adventures upon which I embark each morning when I open my eyes. I am alive. That is the first sensation. I undergo it to its uttermost, sometimes with a hand on my heart, conscious of each breath drawn from the deep wells of being. My eyes take in the light. You will laugh at me, Beloved, but I count the furniture in my little room as a miser counts his gold to be sure none has been stolen during the night. I touch the book beside my bed, the flowers in a vase. I dress slowly, using my good arm as a musician does a cherished instrument with an increasing sense of power. My breakfast seems to me a wonderful thing, to be savored as if it were a new fragrance. My mother watches me with her kind smile and calls me 'gourmand.' It isn't the food; it is the idea that I can eat, that I am alive. The city is a magic place. How can I tell you the acute impressions that strike my eyes, my ears, my nostrils? I am like any foolish woman lingering in front of shop windows. I am drawn by their glitter. Who would believe, Natalie, that there are so many things for sale? I gape at a jeweler's shop like any savage. I am drunk with the odors of damp, of humanity, of stray scents that bring me the moldy smell of fields and stables. I am dizzy with the spectacle of motors, horses, people —tangled, moving in unfinished circles that never close. I tingle with the discords that strike notes of life, an incomprehensible jargon no one stops to translate. This then is the city; And I am part of it. This then is the chief, the visible manifestation of life: a medley of man and his playthings, his necessities renewed endlessly, endlessly productive.

"If it were so! But when I have drunk to its last sweet drop the sensation of life, I begin to think. Then my eyes change, Natalie, as with a click the machine adjusts itself to another vision. I still see the city, but it is bleeding as if it had been pierced by a thousand javelins. The women wear black. Their faces are like little mirrors in which I see always the same grave. Those who wear brighter colors look like flowers out of season, costly, self-conscious. The uniforms go by like bits of a flag that is growing smaller as the pieces are torn off. Who will put it together again? The infirm, the diseased, the anemic, the old men, display their weaknesses as if to explain why they are still alive. Where is the youth of France? Where is France in this city that is being drained? The external appearances of life are here. There are people who buy and people who sell. The show is fair, as if a few miles away the soul of a nation were not being riddled with shots. But the sound of killing mingles with the hubbub of traffic. In sneaks among the living, humming its monotone. It raps on the shop windows, mocking the futility of wares. What use is this jewel, this flower?

"Humanity is more inaccessible than God, Natalie. We are of it: it is never with us . . . always beyond on its mad race. Sometimes I think we never meet it face to face, even in the enemy. We fight an elusive evil. You say it is tyranny we fight. Then must we crush humanity . . . our friend, our enemy? . . . There is no good in my reasoning. I am an atavic animal. I owe my life to the Bourdons and to France. I have not yet paid my debt. I am alive. But, Beloved, am I happy? Only you can make me believe I am."

Pierre was right. He was an atavic animal. The Bourdon blood was in him, the Bourdon spirit urged him on. His mind alone pleaded separate functions that kept him an awakened entity struggling against the confining bonds of a race. But at times he yielded to the pressure of kinship, adopting a cause with the phrases and gestures of his father.

When, as often happened, he and Jean Bourdon went out to walk, they merged identities in a single pace, a single expression. They walked as owner and heir treading their land. Each represented the other's worth in society. Pierre was the army, Jean Bourdon the bourgeoisie, the industrial who has profited and now pays a citizen's fee. They walked with the manner of men who are acquitting themselves honorably of a duty. They talked politics. They were of the same opinion. Jean Bourdon tore down governments and put them up again. Pierre echoed without much conviction. Pierre pointed out the beauty of a monument, a building. His father agreed importantly. France was their refrain, France before the war and after: what prospects would attend victory, what art, industry, commerce, would follow the annihilation of the "Barbarians." And in their golden plans, built with the ardent heart of a people, from ruins burst cities, from graves prosperity. The spirit of France surrounded them reassuringly. Its history loomed in stone. The plumes of ancient chivalry waved on the blue helmets of modern warriors. The wit of generations sparkled in the mouths of urchins. France was everywhere. And in the tragic epoch where world issues were at stake, where human misery, ambition, grandeur and folly ran riot among men, the people of France, true to their greater selves, fought for their Latin heritage, in the only way they knew how.

Jean Bourdon believed in his sons just as he believed in France. One son was dead, one wounded, one in daily peril. But behind them came Jean Paul, Henri and the newly born Raymond. As he had lived, so they would live, and die if necessary. He did not see them or France any mightier, any wiser at dealing with economic problems once the struggle ended; he saw Alsace-Lorraine reconquered, and the sons of his sons upholding the name of Bourdon throughout shifting generations.

As he walked with his son Pierre, he counted the sympathetic looks of strangers, and, secure beside the uniform, he reaped the benefits of sacrifice. But Pierre had no such innocent vanity. He walked as he had been taught to do beside his father, sweetly conscious of the worthy man, his truant thoughts returning ever to Natalie, whose image he sought now to associate with that of his family.

One day in the early Spring, a letter, his last, reached Germaine from Robert de Gency. It was his farewell. He had volunteered to go upon a mission from which there was little chance of his return.

He wrote: "My little Germaine, forgive

me. If I never see you again, believe that I have done my duty as a soldier, putting my country first, even before you. You would not have it otherwise. We might have been very happy. But if I had failed to give my best to France, we should never have been happy; and if, in giving my best, I lose my life, you must also give your best and bear the loss as I would have you—with pride and honor. You are young, my dearest. I have grown old since the war. I have dreamed of our home, of our children. Many others have dreamed and gone dreaming to a glorious death. Perhaps it was never to be. Our country is in such danger that perhaps we cannot save it. But before I go, I want to tell you, Germaine, that I respect my enemies. In the beginning I, with the others, despised them. We covered them with vulgar abuse. We gave them no credit for courage. We were wrong. They are poor men like ourselves, good and bad, fighting because they have to. If they had known what war is to-day, many of them would not have gone. But it is too late. They are fed with lies. They tell each other lies to keep their spirit up. The world is a sad place to-day. Who would have thought it? We are poor beings, forced to be heroes or to die cowards. In a few hours Robert de Gency may have ceased to exist. Yet the war will go on. Be good to my family, little Germaine. They will need you. Do not cry. Keep me in your heart and remember that I died for France."

Germaine lay on her bed tearlessly, clasping the letter to her breast. Beside her Robert de Gency's photograph stood draped with a small flag. She lay in dreadful silence, with closed eyes. And no one knew the mystery of her virgin grief. No one could read the stricken young face, nor break the gates closed on her loss.

Robert de Gency, brave in a spotless uniform, his clean sword uplifted in the sun, rode backwards and forwards in her empty brain. He was not dead. The secret dreams of youth, the worship of the hero, rose between him and the telling shot. Beloved life was not clipt in a moment, leaving nothing. Robert would come back, brave and young, to speak to her of victory. Victory dwelt only in his return. Death came to older men.

The enemy, who had hitherto been a vague threatening nightmare, invisible and alien, a counter-force against which, magnificently, France in the image of Robert de Gency had tilted her clean vanquishing steel, became a concrete monster, a giant crouching on the land with weapon aimed murderously at Robert's heart: a monster whose hate for Germaine directed the blow. Robert had said, "Poor men!" No man was poor who wantonly destroyed love. And so hate entered Germaine's soul.

Still she did not cry. She lay among the ruins of her youth, cursing in strange formless names the poor thing men called war.

On the second evening, Pierre tiptoed into the dark little room and took her hand. At the touch of a man's hand she shivered as if a blade had found her, and rising like a young fury from her despair, hurled wild phrases at him.

"Kill . . . Kill back!" she screamed. "Kill them . . . every one! You must . . . you must. I tell you to." Her shrill voice brought the Bourdons, haggard with her pain, rushing into the room. They found her facing Pierre, her fists clenched, her face twisted in demented grimace. She stamped a bare foot on the ground. Her loosened hair stirred as if a wind were in it.

"No mercy! You . . . you go out and find the man," she raved to Pierre, who was trying in vain to calm her. "Or else bring Robert back. No . . . he can't come back. Kill . . . kill them. I'll be glad."

Madame Bourdon leaned against the wall, a hand to her heart.

"Dear God, the child is mad. My poor little Germaine is mad!"

Lorraine went forward, her arm outstretched. "Germaine!"

Germaine turned on her and began to laugh. "Oh, it's you, is it? Well, you sent your love out too . . . I told you it was the only way. You fool—to have listened to me. . . . He won't come back now." Her voice mounted. "Well, if he doesn't . . . what do I care? Tell him to find the man and kill. . . . Let them all kill."

Lorraine's lips moved, but she made no sound, and fell back, her hand over her eyes.

Then suddenly the crazy laughter broke. Germaine staggered, fell on her knees beside the bed and wept as children do in a first paroxysm of pain.

"Thank God," whispered Jean Bourdon. "She will be better now."

Louise Bourdon walked into the room. Her thin figure, weighed down by crêpe, moved slowly like Fate, straight over to Germaine. Only once she spoke:

"Leave me with her."

Their eyes signaled and, with tacit accord, they obeyed. One after the other, they stole out of the room. Pierre was the last to go. Still Germaine wept hopelessly, her body given over to the spasms that racked her like a frail branch in a storm.

Louise knelt beside her, and Pierre left the two. Soon there was silence. And all that night there was silence, while Louise Bourdon kept mysterious watch over the girl.

Pierre could not sleep. Germaine's mad cries rang in his ears.

"Kill them . . . kill every one!"

And the horror was upon him. For the greater was his grief, the less he wanted to kill. These things could not be mended. Yet the cry was there, so thrilling that it pierced him like a mortal wound. His arm, still lifeless, strove to rise, as if the weight of a gun were on it. He heard the voices of his comrades in the night, saw their strained red eyes fixed on a distant line of fire. He feared to hear them call him, and drew the sheets over his head, that he might evoke Natalie's image to his rescue. But as he saw her, she too appeared an avenging spirit pointing to the smoking chaos where among poisonous gases men reeled and died. He reached out like a sick child, begging a life-giving cup to quench his thirst. Fever consumed him.

He lived again the parting when on the threshold of the unknown he had turned to Natalie, received her blessing, and gone out to accomplish a sacred duty to mankind. He felt that he had failed. Even his death could not have redeemed humanity. Yet he remained an atom and a factor in the mighty struggle that was raging even now over land and sea and air. He could never detach himself from it. He tried to build a crystal cathedral from the remnants of the battlefield. He tried to build a shrine where, helpless and disabled, he might still pray for future generations. But the obsession of death was with him: death in myriad forms. He dared not tell this to Natalie. Her vision was the surer.

She sensed the nobler issues and she shamed him.

He groped there in the night reconstructing his faith as in the beginning, born from her love. And like a child inventing a fairy story, he wove from his own yearning an ideal world risen from sacrifice.

The enemy of mankind was defeated. The land, freed from an invader, lifted its crushed fruits in fecund bloom. The patient labor of men and women reconstructed villages, erected new churches to a grateful God; governments reformed laws, shifted unjust taxes, welded industries in friendly coöperation, mingled arts, shared the seas, profited fairly by one another's products, encouraged free thought in little countries, and by generous consent set a limit to armies and navies. In a solemn union joined together on the wreckage of battlefields, nations, with fraternal accord, banished forever the beast they had conceived, and set to evolving a final and ultimate civilization. For this, Raymond, Robert de Gency, Nassaud, Lodec and millions of others had died. For this he would have died gladly.

So shaping an exultant vision of peace, and dedicating it to Natalie, when dawn came, Pierre closed his eyes and slept quietly.

# XII

ABOVE everything Natalie wanted Pierre to be happy. If she could have done so, she would have removed from his mind all thoughts of war. His mission was accomplished; his life, once risked, was given back to her. But with the gathering of fresh sap in his veins, the rejuvenescence of the body, his spirit halted on the brink of a complete joy. The smiles and dreams Natalie coaxed from him were like bewildered birds on the threshold of an opened cage, fearing flight. At times his eyes were set on her with a strange questioning fixity that probed inner shrines. It was as if these two souls, his and hers, were two stars pursuing one another on the same orbit, within sight but never fused, condemned to travel like twin aspirations divided by a mysterious law.

Natalie's voice was harnessed to a phantom she called hope.

"It will soon be over," she kept telling Pierre. "And then we'll see races united, disarmament, a lasting peace."

She could not unburden her heart.

But when Pierre answered: "France will rise from this bitter test like a man purified by a long illness," she thought sadly of the wars to come, the sickness for which sometimes there is no cure. She wanted to say: "Pierre, every nation to-day is ailing with the malady called nationalism. The remedy lies among the people, but they do not know how sick they are. They listen to the munition maker's diagnosis and they take the government's medicine."

Since he had come back to the House of the Bourdons, general issues had faded from Pierre's mind. He spoke of evil and named it Prussia; he spoke of good and named it France. The united races fought for the sublime cause of France: not for supremacy of seas, commercial advantage, colonies, or protection of wealth. The people fought for the people, not for a powerful minority. And Natalie listening to him had no heart for contradiction.

"Look how we are," he said. "Before the war we squabbled among ourselves. Nothing was good. We ridiculed each other in a pother of small revolutions that got nowhere. Art wrangled with art, people with administrations, the State with God. We were tangled in a muddle of petty officials, intrigue, prejudices . . . words, phrases, gesticulations. We caricatured our rivals and called it wit. Progress was a question of bribes, taxes, decorations. The socialists fought against the army. The man who roared the loudest became a national idol on a tottering pedestal. But now look at us! One nation, one voice, one ideal . . . an heroic vision of a loyal race united in a single purpose . . ."

To which Natalie might have replied: "Romantic, sublime children, your France is in your hearts, the banner of an illusion. You are saving your land to give it to the man who put a gun in your hand. Your earnings are the price of the gun you hold. When will you see that? And not you alone are blind. It is not France alone who will win or lose uselessly in this war. It is the people of every nation."

Instead she answered: "The blood of France is a costly wine—and what will become of future grapevines?"

Pierre cried: "There will always be more vines!"

The armies never wavered. Nor did the death of brave men postpone the coming of Spring. The stir of laboring earth thrilled across the mutilated frontiers, imperceptible as the ripening of fruit. The exiled birds, returning, sailed over ruins to fertile spots where, behind the smoking line, nature went through its eternal images in the mystery of travail. Sunny villages gave an illusion of safety. The gestures of life were the same. Cities strove to conquer anguish. There were certain things that went on, while the fate of Europe hung solemn and significant over trampled land and treacherous seas.

The Seine glittered across the city, riveting it with a silver band. In the gardens green eyes tipped every branch. The alleys warmed slowly, and over the soft gray streets streamed humanity in supple, livelier forms as if their crusted hearts had burst like tiny seeds. The surface of the season lay lightly over drama. Sun stole through the windows of the hundred hospitals where mummied figures lay in rows and rows on beds of pain. Endless lines of gray ambulances, branded with the red symbol of the Divine Martyr, sped down white roads lined with sweet fruit blossoms. Crippled men, clad in their worn raiment of glory, limped, groped and hopped from warming ray to ray, like maimed birds of brilliant plumage seeking a friendly ledge. And the women in black uncovered their sad faces to look for memories of happier Aprils.

Natalie went out again and hunted for beauty that she might give it to Pierre and quiet her own torment. She thought: "Surely, after nine months of bloodshed, human nature will be sadder and wiser. Sacrifice will have ennobled the people. Something will come out of it. I must find an indication of the utility of such protracted butchery."

She found an exasperated condition of virtue and wickedness. Elemental nature had not changed, would not change. But it was as if a powerful lens had been applied to human beings, magnifying their motives and their acts. They handled drama with the serious airs of experts pronouncing on the value of common goods. They patronized each other's miseries. They spent their love and hate as from an exhaustless fund, when all the time credit was getting lower.

Beauty lay among the humble whose sacrifice merged into an ungilded thing called the spirit of the people, and whose habits of obedience now served them well: transformed into a philosophic patriotism. They gave their best with the simple pride of realized force necessary to their country, a free gift to the governing classes. They believed that in giving now they would not have to give later. By protecting their homes they were lending their good will and faith to a government. They worshiped their own men, whose sublime courage and patience traced again in letters of gold the spirit of France. But Natalie, as she looked deeper, saw the tragic futility of that beauty which, in stemming a hostile tide, exhausted its very essence. It was a beauty that lifted the people but did not remedy evil. It was a beauty risen from emergency. Grievances were not exterminated: they were postponed. The wage-earners, the socialists, the idealists, in yielding to a crisis had merely proclaimed a truce. There would be a reckoning day.

Natalie could not forget the others whose love for suffering humanity found fat profit in exploiting it. They were the men and women whose philanthropic impulse had run its term, and who, continuing a decorative show of good, relapsed into secret weariness, or plotted for rewards, sustained their reputations as benefactors as an advertisement for future reference. There were those, too, who mended men and fed the hungry with a terrible efficiency that hid their empty hearts. And there were those who, sincerely convinced of their own disinterestedness, glowed comfortably with a sense of importance and virtue easily paid for. The supply of good done, apart from motives, simply filled the demand, as commodities are circulated to fit a public need, as labor is measured by capital. There was no credit in it. Natalie could not see why relief work should be glorified. It fulfilled its functions, not even balancing disaster. The debt to society was a larger one than philanthropists could ever settle.

Pierre watched wistfully the slow birth of the season—his longing matching Natalie's, but his mind more easily diverted from somber themes. His youth and convalescence sought outlet in the love of one woman, the love of life.

"Beloved, I should like to run away with you and forget everything!" he exclaimed one day.

Natalie smiled and answered: "Well, we will go, you and I and Felix, and forget everything for a little while."

The next day was a Sunday: a day destined to remain with her forever after, set in her heart. They three were deliberately young and happy, conspirators with the sun and sky. When Natalie saw Pierre early that morning she knew that it would be a cloudless day. His eyes were lit in boyish expectancy, his face was bright with joy of greeting her.

"How beautiful you are, Beloved!"

Good, kind Felix beamed. He wore his old Norfolk jacket, its pockets bulging with odds and ends. A Panama hat was tilted over his humorous face. Carrying a little luncheon-basket he lounged beside the lovers, in a holiday mood. The city basked beneath a premature warmth. The river, glistening, caught their eyes and decided their course.

"Let us go with the people to Vincennes," suggested Pierre joyously.

It was one of those days when gentler thoughts come to human beings, when laws of harmony strike eye and ear. "What is the use of living?" growls the misanthropist, to be met with an answer, "For this!" For the sheer thrill of being, of inhaling air that is like a promise, of seeing the smooth river glide away heavy with sunlight, carrying colorful little boats to unknown destinations, of feeling the quickening of sap in stem and bark, of breathing the spicy dreams that hide in the first green blades. There is nothing behind, there is nothing ahead: only the present consciousness of aspiring life.

They paused on a dock near the Pont des Arts, and sniffed deliciously a faded smell of fish and humid moss. Beside them clustered the people, lively products of a generous nation, ready with good-natured sallies, swift and shrewd of tongue and glance, able to keep their heart brave on this Sunday because there were enough weekdays to work and suffer in. Presently a little boat slid beneath the bridge, and bustled up to the dock to take on Pierre and Natalie and Felix. There were no empty seats. But an old red-cheeked woman, built in cheerful curves, rose alertly to offer her place to the wounded *poilu*. Pierre's smile of refusal encouraged her to voluble confidences. And she was soon telling her neighbors of the three sons she had given to France.

Pierre's uniform answered for Felix and Natalie. They shared the general good will of unshaven honest little soldiers, hatless women, pink-faced fathers of families, children and dogs. The boat seemed to be carrying them all away from anguish, as if its progress past the mellow quais, melodious domes and graceful bridges was an effortless part of the day. The city belonged to the people: Sunday belonged to them. The Garden of Henri IV, advancing like the prow of a ship, was spangled with green. The bronze statue of Henri IV, towering on the bridge, rode ever forward on his full-chested charger, a brave gentleman, ageless in his gallantry. The river curved softly around the Ile Saint-Louis, lined with beloved old houses, dappled with pale gold. On the lower banks, quaint symbols of the season, stood patient fishermen dangling their thin lines.

Pierre and Natalie stood very close to one another, leaning against the boat's railing. Their faces reflected tenderness and gratitude. They seldom spoke. But when Pierre turned to Natalie, or she to him, the simple phrase in the framing was answered almost before it was pronounced. And their smiles met.

Pierre said: "In all the world there is nothing like this."

Natalie said: "See how the sky is melted in the river, and how soft the light is. There are no edges anywhere."

Honest Felix stood behind them puffing at his pipe, chuckling companionably at the antics of a puppy, content to ruminate and leave the lovers free. His delighted expression when Natalie turned to him showed clearly his whole-hearted rapture at his sister's mood.

As the boat nosed farther up the river, factories lifted their lean nozzles from robust quarters of toil. And the sleeping industries reared ungainly silhouettes, oddly unfamiliar in their inactivity.

Pierre pointed to the chimneys.

"They look like cannons."

Natalie touched his arm quickly. "No! . . . No, we want to forget to-day."

Then the little boat, with a great show of importance, drew up at Vincennes and the surge of a vivacious crowd swept them onwards to the shore. Immediately the people scattered in noisy groups or sentimental couples, spreading from populous districts on the roads that led to the woods.

The three friends stood momentarily bewildered, their eyes consulting.

"This is the first time I've done anything like this since the war," escaped from Natalie, and she added gayly to offset the reference, "Let's go adventuring!" She felt stimulated, warmed by the presence of the people. They taught her how to relax. Then there was Pierre, his thin face flushed and boyish, his voice eagerly raised as echo to her slightest wish.

Felix dug his hands in his pockets and strode off, choosing a hill. He whistled a little tune in syncopated rhythm. And as if he had known it would be so, this road wound away from the people and led to quiet places. Natalie and Pierre followed slowly, their arms linked. All along the way ran a low rustic fence. The earth and trees, buoyantly fragrant, gave out young sprigs of green. As they mounted, the hill billowed away. Below coiled other white roads, a line of silver marking the river, and other softly etched hills. Fruit blossoms sprang in the distance like white birds flying. All about them it was very quiet, except for the uneven rustle of wings and insect voices.

"We were made for this and this was made for us," sighed Natalie. "After all, Peter, here is the truth. Why don't we confess ourselves beaten and be as happy as we could be?"

"I should love to live in the country with you, but then I couldn't build houses," said Pierre quaintly.

"You could build cottages!" she joked.

"Many cottages would make a city."

"And many cities make wars," she mused. "Well, there you have it. Let us find an island, Peter, and you build just one house on it."

Entering into the spirit of her dream, he said earnestly, "It will be the most beautiful house in the world . . . white, Natalie, and built like a tower, covered with rose-vines and honeysuckle. And the island will be a garden."

"The garden," decided Natalie, "is my affair. It must be all white and gold, with spots of purple among the green, and cypress trees marking the alleys. And there will be a special wild meadow filled with buttercups, where little white goats and sheep may graze."

"And the sea around us," interrupted Pierre, "will be blue as children's eyes."

"And there will be fruit trees . . . oranges and olives."

"And there will be a young shepherd who will play his pipes at sunset."

"You people, I see a bit of something that looks like grass and a brook," Felix called back at them. "Suppose we picnic here."

Felix, who was deft at service, soon arranged a pleasant feast that beckoned to their appetites. Pierre leaned against a tree and sighed, "Arcadia!"

Natalie, looking at him, thought how simple and wise was this manner of living, and drew from her imagination happy dreams of the magic island. Some day they would go there.

Not far away squatted a merry family like-wise preparing their meal. The children romped over the ragged grass, sniffing the air like young animals. The father, a soldier back on leave, lazed at full length, his elbows crooked, his hands clasped behind his neck. His old mother and his wife busied themselves with a lunch-basket. Farther along, a couple strolled, amorously inclined one towards the other, the young soldier's arm around the girl. An old man and woman passed, dressed in deep mourning. They walked gravely as if they were retracing past joys.

"Fall to, friends! What's the matter with this?" cried Felix. His kindly smile enveloped them. "Say, isn't this some life?" He sat Turkish-fashion in front of Natalie.

The brook was slim and gurgled a cool little song as it tripped over the stones. A few dead leaves crumpled in final surrender. Hidden among the foliage were late violets. Voices sounded in hollow resonance from an invisible road.

They ate their bread and cheese and eggs, drank the red wine, and chattered of the present. When they had finished Felix produced his pipe, Pierre a cigarette, and they sat in the sunshine, their silences more frequent.

Pierre looked at the passersby, the people who, old and young, trod the blossoming earth as if it were a gift, mingling their talk and laughter in brisk dissonances that could not break the charm.

"How we need this thing," he said, and toyed with a handful of uprooted green. "The people go to the country as naturally as sheep to pasture. They are satisfied with so little, too. Within sight of roofs and chimneys, dressed in the cumbersome clothes of the city, they pretend that they are free, one day a week, because they walk across a patch of grass, pick a flower or two, take off their coats and hats and feel the earthy mold beneath their feet. They need to get away from streets, from stuffy shops and stuffy homes and the constant plagues of everyday existence. And they have that spark in them that brings them, without reasoning, in tune with this." He buried his face suddenly in a clump of green.

"They're children," said Felix. "Look at that man playing with his kids." An elderly bald person, followed by a noisy brood in joyous chase, raced past. He was breathing hard, his red, shining face set in the excitement of the game.

"Papa . . . Papa . . . eh, Papa!" panted his young sons, galloping after him. He gave Natalie a neighborly comprehensive look as he allowed himself to be caught.

"These people do understand beauty," Natalie murmured. "They find it in such simple things. Our people are more self-conscious. They can't amuse themselves in the same way. We are children, too, but of a cruder type. We never forget our strength. Do you remember what an imp you used to be, Felix, when you were a boy?"

Felix chuckled reminiscently.

"We lived in the country," she went on.

"We lived in an old house near a lake. We were always risking our necks climbing trees and other deviltries. And we always turned up for meals with bruises, torn clothes and appetites."

Pierre showed immediate interest. "Tell me more, Natalie. You've never spoken much about your family. Would they like me?"

"Sure!" broke heartily from Felix.

"When Father died," continued Natalie, "the old house had to be sold. It was terrible. Felix hid in the stable and refused to leave. We found him buried in the hay."

"I thought you'd forget me and I'd stay on," said Felix.

"He wouldn't cry. In fact I believe he whistled all the way to the station. Didn't you?"

"It was that or bust," was the laconic answer.

"My mother tried to keep her courage up. I remember she told us fairy tales all the way to the city. She didn't want us to realize. But life was changed. We lived in a tiny flat, and Mother slaved and slaved, depriving herself of everything in order that we might have an education. She sent us here because she felt that a year or two in Europe would give us more chances."

"I guess we can take care of her now," said Felix, chewing the end of his pipe.

Natalie looked at him cheerfully, "Yes, we can."

Pierre was silent. He was imaging the mother who would send her children so far away that they might work out their own lives.

"It is different," he said at last.

"Your mother wouldn't understand that?" cried Natalie quickly.

He shook his head. "It's different. To us the home is more important than individual freedom."

Natalie stared at him with a puzzled expression. "But suppose you had to earn your living?"

"We should not need to leave home for that . . . especially the women," he explained gently. "When we are married, Beloved, you will not have to earn your living."

"But I should want to!"

"My mother would not understand. . . . When the war is over, we shall see."

Natalie rose, straightening her shoulders. "Yes, we shall see." Their voices had taken graver notes. Pierre sprang to his feet and put a hand on her arm.

"You shall always do what you want, Beloved!"

The afternoon glowed ripely. A few soft clouds like great flowers floated in the sky. Felix began packing away the remnants of the feast. And soon they started walking again, he in advance as if he were exploring, they behind, with slow pace and lowered eyes.

Pierre said, "Beloved, we shall be happy."

She answered, "Yes," her heart inexplicably heavy. The people around her seemed intruders to this mood. There were too many people. They swarmed among the trees in holiday attire.

Pierre went on, "Some day soon I am going to tell my father and mother about you. I am getting strong." He lifted his arm to show her. "And then you will be considered as my fiancée. When the war is over we will marry."

Natalie wanted to ask why they need wait until the end of the war. The horrid thing kept coming back like the fateful tolling of a bell. She saw no escape from it. But his face, turned towards her, was rapt and full of hope. She could not trouble him.

Felix turned and waved his arms. "It's tea-time. I want a beer. What do you say to going in here?" He pointed to a little restaurant. It was a modest place built on the side of a hill, with tables and benches set out beneath a rustic arbor, and steps leading down to a leafy terrace overlooking the country. An old swing hung between two trees. A moldy looking sea-saw lifted a long arm as if in invitation. The gleam of distant fruit trees, of the river, of dreaming hills, tempted Natalie. An old-fashioned sweetness lingered about the place. The girl who served them smiled at Pierre.

As they sat there the magic of the hour held them enmeshed in waning lights, in circling shadows, in the aromas of earth cooling beneath the dusk. The city seemed far away. Nothing existed beyond this lost, nameless spot where thoughts became secretive and gestures slow. Again the sadness crept over Natalie. She strove in vain to push it away. Pierre was near her, safe beside her. He was getting well. But a sense of impending danger persisted. The end of all things must come, struggle as one would. The end of a lovely day was the relinquishment of just one more illusion. She would have summoned the sun back. But it slipped through her fingers and fluttered in elusive flames on the edge of the horizon. This day of forgetfulness was then finished, never to return.

She shivered, and Pierre, with loverlike solicitude, suggested home-going. In his tender eyes she read the confidence she did not feel.

They walked down the hill, the three of them abreast. Felix, his head hunched forward, his hands in his pockets, the lunch-basket strung over his shoulders, appeared immersed in inner speculation. The road dipped in blue shadows that lengthened always ahead of them. They seemed to be leaving something forever.

"What a short day!" said Pierre.

On the boat, returning, she leaned again as she had done that morning, close to him. The people around them, packed tightly, still smiled and jested. But their jests and smiles were older, as if they too sensed a change. The river had grown gray and still. It hardly seemed to move. The lean chimneys of factories looked like the masts of bulky ships. Pink streaked the sky. The city swam in mist, rearing its silhouettes like ghosts. Lights burned unsteady vigils high in the blurred windows. The bridges stretched taut and mysterious from bank to bank.

Natalie felt Pierre's hand in hers, the only warm link between herself and the vanished morning. He did not speak. But as they neared the Pont des Arts, where the little parting would come, she whispered passionately, "Oh, Peter, don't leave me!"

"Why should I, Beloved?"

"I don't know. Everything is so cruel. If every day were only like to-day! Oh, Peter, I wish it were this morning."

He smiled down at her. "There will be many mornings."

But joy he could not give her back, as silently they landed on the little dock and stood for a moment with the dark city towering above them.

## XIII

IT seemed sometimes to Pierre that his family were watching him stealthily, cherishing him the more as his health returned, as if each fresh sign of physical fitness drew from them almost imperceptible emotions of anguish and relief. The dull eyes of Louise Bourdon never left him when she was in the room. He was aware of her fixed mournful gaze, first with a sentiment of pity, then with self-confessed discomfort. When during meals his natural effervescence lifted some enthusiasm, brought a lighter word or smile to the surface, her usual abstracted glance sharpened to rebuke, and she stared at him silently, reminding him of loss. At times it flashed across him that she hated him for being alive, that she resented the accident that had brought him back instead of Raymond. Germaine had become her shadow. The two women were always together, wordless in their cult of the dead, passionately absorbed in Raymond, the newly born. Louise had yielded a share of her jealous motherhood to the girl. And Germaine's aching arms held the baby as if it were her own.

The House of the Bourdons remained dark and dignified, a living altar to the fallen sons of France. There was no place in it for youth and gayety. Jean Bourdon sat most of the time in the room which held the relics of his eldest born. Only Pierre's voice roused him to a semblance of his jovial self. He spoke to the boy of his factories, with rare moods of hope when he saw the men back in their places and the great ovens red with the heat of toil. Pierre felt the unvoiced suggestion that it would be well if, instead of building houses, he followed the traditions of the Bourdons and some day took the place Raymond had left vacant. He dared not face the problem he foresaw.

Madame Bourdon continued her tireless

rounds among the poor and sick, reducing household expenses with rigid efficiency, unbending in her self-discipline, praying to God that she might do her duty to the end. Only Lorraine clung humanly to Pierre, listened to his love for Natalie, shared his hopes and dreams, and encouraged his natural tendencies to creative work. It was she who urged him to take up again his interrupted plans, open his sketch-books, study the profession he believed in above all things.

But one day, when in his room he bent happily over his papers, sorting out old projects, noting ideas on the sheet he had tacked to a board, Louise Bourdon suddenly opened the door and walked in. He raised his face, flushed with the thrill of thought, a smile ready on his lips, to find her standing there staring at the scattered contents of a portfolio. She made no comment. She simply looked at them and at him; then as he started to speak, a visible embarrassment altering his expression, she shook her head and glided out, a long black figure stiff with resentment.

He sat for a long time staring at the things which represented life and work, his impulse checked by troubling questions that flung him again into a world of sickening doubt. Louise Bourdon's look condemned. It said, "If you are well enough for this, you should not be here." He cast away the thought, only to have it return like some treacherous enemy who crawls and hides in underbrush, and sends tormenting darts to strike a vulnerable spot.

Why should he not build up again that which he had considered lost? Was there less credit in whole-hearted work than before? He was not a coward. He had done his part of the killing. And he had been pronounced unfit. His absence did not alter the destiny of nations. On the other hand, his was a useful brain employed at a task of reconstruction. He could not mourn forever. His mind traveled ahead to devastated regions where such men as he would be needed to put together again the homes men had wrecked. This was his life, his duty. Louise Bourdon had no right to judge him. Her vision was darkened by Raymond's grave.

His pencil hovered over the sheet. He saw communities risen from ashes, saw lines and colors forming. He saw the peaceful smoke from many chimneys. He saw windows that let in the light, and doors through which men and women on their several missions came and went, freed from the nightmare. Then his eyes, sweeping over the clean expanse to be covered with the work of his hands and brain, struck the color of his uniform. He was still clad in the livery of war. Of what use his dreams? The muffled roar of cannon sounded in his ears, the sharper rattle of machine guns. The din of battle reached him—there was no other noise that held against it. He buried his face in his hands but could not hide the awful vision of ruins. His schemes were puerile. He could have wept to find them so lost in catastrophe.

Henri's return on leave wakened the house to another welcome. But his coming was different from Pierre's. He brought the clamor of war, the lust of adventure, the loud comradeship of good fellows. He filled the place with his honest boasting. And when, in the evening, the family circle formed around Grandmother Bourdon's armchair, he straddled the hearth where once Raymond had stood, telling heroic anecdotes of the trenches, of night attacks, of perilous missions. Then the women would lay aside their work. Except Lorraine, who drooped inconspicuously in a corner, they listened avidly. Their eyes brightened, reflecting Henri, the Warrior. Louise, kindled by his tales, glowed with strange fitful fevers that burned through her mask, quickened her breathing and held her tensely, as if at a signal her bloodless lips would take up the cry of vengeance and thrill it over graves. Old Jean Bourdon rounded his chest with a look of resolute pride. Every once in a while he nodded approvingly and glanced at his wife. Here was something worth the Bourdon traditions!

Henri's manner to his brother was patronizing and friendly. He included him in his stories with a—"Of course, Pierre, you know what it is,"—"You must have seen this . . . or that,"—"We'll get them, my boy, never fear!" Pierre would smile a trifle sadly. He did not feel at his ease. When Henri turned to him, the rest of the family turned also, looking at him expectantly, as if they were sounding the value of his echo and waiting for rivaling tales.

Once Henri asked exuberantly, "How is your little American?" At the implied lightness of his consideration for Natalie, Pierre flushed hotly and answered with sudden impulse, "Mademoiselle Shaw and her brother are quite well!" He felt his mother's eyes upon him as Henri tossed the question and reply aside, to attack a less sensitive topic. He might have blurted out the love with which his heart was laden, had not Lorraine laid a hand on his arm and drawn him aside, pretending a diverting comment. Later Henri, as if to prove his good will, tapped Pierre on the shoulder. "Well, you'll soon be back with us," he said. Madame Bourdon started forward but restrained herself with obvious effort. Louise and Germaine watched as if the innocent question uncovered a riddle. Pierre's delay in answering was hardly perceptible. He was taken by surprise. Yet he realized that he must always have known that such a question would arise.

"I suppose so," he murmured.

Evidently Henri detected the hesitancy, for during the last few days of his stay he referred often to Pierre's health, taking for granted his eagerness to rejoin his regiment.

"As for me," he would cry, "as long as I can hold a gun, I stay with the comrades!" His eye challenged Pierre. But Pierre refused gently to be drawn into an argument. Henri's vigorous combativeness dismayed him. There was more than love of France in Henri's manner; there was a discovered, an indulged aggressiveness. He did not conceal his admiration for certain young bloods of English officers he had met. He quoted them importantly at every opportunity.

"War is a sport," was his refrain.

Pierre was not sorry to see him go, although the women wept and the House was plunged again in dignified gloom. He could not think quietly while Henri's martial voice dinned in his ears. And he needed to think. The problems of life and death loomed again before him in all their stark simplicity. Henri had spoken of a gun. Pierre was now strong enough to lift a gun. But there was something else more elusive than physical fitness. His mind was still involved in tenebrous speculations, lit by gleams from Natalie's clear gaze. He dreaded confessing to her his uncertainties. In her occasional melancholy he thought he divined reproach. For what? Her tenderness encompassed him, yet there were secret corners in his soul where she might not go. He himself had not explored those corners fully. Such pain as he had endured seemed mean in contrast to the increasing torment of his spirit. He stood again at the beginning of a nightmare, as if the months behind him counted only as confused memories of a like horror, dissipated then by his exalted will. But now the tocsin rang. Should he obey? He intended to fight the problem without consulting Natalie. He imagined her disappointment at any exposed weakness.

And for several days he stayed cloistered in his room, pretending an indisposition, during which time he wrote to Natalie, laying the letters away and marking them as hers, in case death should strike him.

He wrote: "Beloved, I am questioning roots. I have gone below the surface and felt the clammy mysterious matter from which all things grow. And I find there a tenacious love of life. Not selfish life, though all life is a form of egoism. But life that seeks expression in its noblest essence. Where am I most useful? Or am I useful in any way?

I started yesterday to plan a model village. I put into it my love of life. The implements at hand were my old belongings dating back to the happy Beaux Arts days. I had left something of myself in them. They are intelligent, animate. The village sprang into being. I could build it to-morrow. But when is that to-morrow? Alas! Yet it must come. And I wonder if I am to see its dawn. I am here now quivering with the creative force that drives me ever to accomplishment. I stand a pigmy on the edge of God's destruction and my heart is great with longing. Which is the truth? The masses have spoken. There is no place for my village to-day. Then . . . ?"

He wrote: "Beloved, if I go, you will understand. If I stay, you will understand. A night of fever—when in my head a thousand devils tore and raged, mauling my inner shrines, profaning my prayers. I dressed in my uniform, took out my gun, and stood by the open window, spying for Satan to ride past. Yes, I was mad. Then the fever left me, and I was emptied of all passions. But dreams are quicksand, Natalie. Since I see no end to anything I have decided to go and find the end. It is our last privilege. If my death could only settle the affairs of the universe and free my country from the curse I would gladly die. But Christ's death did not save mankind. I have examined my heart. I find you and France there and other nameless longings I do not recognize. Did you put them there? The invader is in our land, and the invader is Evil. That is what you and I decided. But, once vanquished, where will Evil hide? In what lofty Hell will Evil find hospitality? It is not a trifling diseased thing to be kicked into the nearest gutter. Evil is powerful as any nature force is powerful. The plans for my village lie close to me. I have not looked at them. Of what use if I go? For I shall never come back."

He wrote: "Beloved, I dreamed you came to me with your arms outstretched. They were so long and white, they stretched beyond me far into the world. And you said, 'Do not go.' I tried to promise I would not, but the words choked in my throat. I woke sobbing like a child. What is this mystery? I am well. But my spirit is not quiet. It moves and moves like an imprisoned bird. The earth is an aviary, Natalie. It holds all our struggling souls.

"There was one day a long while ago when I stood on a mountain. I was alone with God. I did not know you then. God meant the things I worshiped: the sky, the mountains, the valley, all impregnated with a divine significance, a message men might read if they chose. As I looked, up the steep road labored a heavy cart drawn by one horse. A man was flogging the horse, the whip whistling through the air with an ugly, snaky sound. Further down the hill a woman was beating a child. The child cried meekly, as if it were accustomed to pain. And down in the valley two sportsmen hunted birds. I could hear the sharp snap of the guns. From the neighboring wood I could hear the clang of an ax. A man was cutting down a tree. Below, in a field, two men quarreled. I saw one strike the other. The nature-things about me had not changed. But I had changed. For this incessant destruction sounded a note of life. Was it the only one? I could not believe it. And, as I looked, I saw the smoke from the chimney of a cottage curling away in lovely spirals. I heard the bells of a distant church ringing the vespers, I saw two lovers winding their way up a hill. I heard a man singing. I saw a man tilling the ground. And here again was life. Then I wondered which was my way. Perhaps it was not to kill, Beloved, under any pretext! Perhaps it is to build. Men may take me for a coward. Braver souls than I have been branded with that name. But what will you call me? Nothing in your manner to me lately has revealed your wishes or your convictions. But I have reread your wonderful letters to me, out there . . . and

I find in them a knowledge of wider causes than our own individual problems. Are these causes directly dependent on our actions or are they evolved from inevitable world situations which put us at the mercy of an epoch? Natalie, I am going to my mother now, and I am going to tell her of you, of my desire to marry you immediately. Then I shall tell her that I do not want to kill again. And we will see what she says. I am a Bourdon. I cannot help it; I am as caught by it as a leaf on a tree. I cannot break with them. Their honor is my honor. But, oh, Beloved . . . !"

Pierre went to his mother. She was in her room, kneeling on her prie-dieu before a mahogany crucifix. She fingered her rosary devoutly, her head bowed, her lips moving. She did not turn to greet him, and he waited. The atmosphere of the room closed about him. It had never changed since he could remember. The bed was draped suffocatingly in red plush with a lace cover made by Grandmother Bourdon in her younger days. Nailed at the head of the bed was a sprig of faded green. A massive Breton wardrobe loomed in a corner as impregnable as a fortress. A little table held Madame Bourdon's glasses, her watch and a prayer book. The air was close and dull, as if nothing had happened in this room for centuries. The windows never seemed to have been opened. Pierre, looking down at the rigid figure of his mother, was seized with a swift misgiving. There was something terrifying in her immobility. At last her fingers traced the symbol in final punctuation of her devotions and she rose slowly, as one whose knees are weak, her face austere in its communion with duty.

"Thou, Pierre?"

"Mother, I want to speak to you," he began quickly. "I want to tell you many things."

She sank into a chair at the foot of the bed. He noticed that she looked old and tired.

"What is it, my son?" she said kindly.

He stood before her, his eyes direct in glance, his arms at his sides.

"It is this way. I love the American girl, Natalie Shaw. I have not told you before. But, Maman, she means more to me than all the world, except you and Papa. She has been my strength, my inspiration, during these months. She has been my comrade, my dear sister, my love. Maman, I cannot live without her. I ask your blessing. I want to marry her soon, very soon. You will love her." His eyes, grown anxious, studied the inflexible lines of his mother's face. She seemed turned to stone. She sat, her hands in her lap, as if in grave meditation. And she waited.

He went on passionately. "She will be a good daughter to you, Maman. She is not of our race, but she is well brought up. She and Felix have spoken often to me of their family. She . . . she has no dowry, Maman. But I am young and strong now. I can work for her. I will keep her. And we Bourdons know, don't we, that a loyal heart is greater than a fortune? She is intelligent, Maman. I could not love a stupid girl. Ah, Maman, I know you will understand. . . ." He sank on his knees before her, inviting the maternal gesture.

Madame Bourdon spoke with sudden harshness that broke his appeal like a blow. "And your duty as a Frenchman?"

He lifted himself to his feet as if he had been struck. "My duty?" he said a little wildly. "Ah, I have thought of that, too! I have done my best, Maman. I have done my share. I am well . . . yes . . . in body, but not in soul. I need not go back . . . yet. I am not called. I want to work for France . . . yes. I want to plan for the end of this war. They will need me then." His face shone full upon her, filled with ardent, youthful dreams. "I want to build!" he cried. "Natalie will help me. I want to build up the villages!"

He saw his mother rise. There was something awesome in her rising. Her eyes were set and stern. Her voice rang coldly. "Pierre, my son? You think of love, of marriage with a stranger at such a time? You talk of work for France?" She pointed. "Your work is out there, where your brother died, where Henri has gone. You work is that of a soldier, of a Bourdon. How dare you come to me . . . your mother . . . with this thing? I tell you that this marriage will never be while I live. You, my last born, a coward? It is not possible. If you are well enough to marry, you are well enough to fight. I have wondered . . . and now I know. It is that woman then . . . it is she who has poisoned your mind, turned you from your duty . . . she, the stranger whose land is not in danger. Whom has she lost?" Her passion mounted; with hostile face and cutting voice she scourged him. "Whom has she lost? Tell me that! When Raymond's wife cries for vengeance, when Germaine your sister's life is broken, you speak of love and marriage! Shame on you, Pierre! Shame on us!"

He was trembling from head to foot. Fever blazed in his cheeks. "Maman . . ."

Madame Bourdon advanced towards him. "I will forget this," she said . . . "I will forget it. Let it lie buried between us. But know one thing: that I would rather see you dead than a coward."

Distracted, he clutched her arm. "You say it is Natalie? It is not Natalie! She kept me alive while I was in that hell. Her words have been the inspiration, the only trumpet call. She has loved France. She too has sacrificed. Did she not send me off with a smile? Have you forgotten her that day? Did she not send me off with the courage and the calm of a saint? You shall not be unjust! Natalie has never influenced me in any but noble ways. No, she has not. But don't you see, I am not fitted to be a soldier? There, you have the truth. And I have done my best! But I am more fitted to put my heart and soul in the rebuilding of this sad country."

"Pierre, the men of France are needed to fight. I have no more to say." The mother note had gone from her voice. She walked with a steady step to her prie-dieu and knelt. She knelt rigidly, her lips moving. Pierre knew that she was praying for him. Then despair descended into his soul. His fever left him. He stood cold and desolate like an old man, his mouth empty of words.

When his mother had prayed, she rose and came to him. "Pierre, do thy duty," she said.

He turned and left her.

Night was with him. He had not moved. He had called aloud for Natalie in his solitude, and with a momentary exaltation he felt suddenly her presence in the room.

"Pierre, do thy duty."

This then was his duty. He reached blindly for the creed he had built once before. The room filled with the ghosts of his comrades. He saw them everywhere. He saw Lucien Nassaud, Brillaud de Granville, Jean Lodec and the others. He saw Raymond and Robert de Gency. They pressed around him in serried ranks, pointing to a distant battlefield. He took up a sheet of paper and wrote: "There is no way out. We are Bourdons. There is no way out now. The thing is done. But I have no hate in my heart for any one. Nor have they . . . my comrades. But there is hate in the people behind the battle line. The women hate, because we are killed. The old men hate. They drive us on. We must go. And there are men who are born warriors. So it will ever be. We, the builders, must share their fate or be called cowards. Well, and the country? It is beautiful and tragic. But the other countries see gain ahead. And the smaller ones will be victims until the end of time. I cannot save them though I would if it were in my power. Shall this be a lesson? You nations who are far and wise, watch us die. Let our deaths teach you a lesson. Then it will indeed be worth while. Put those words for which men die out of your hearts. Do not let the lust for armies sneak up on your governments. Nor do not let false fears drive you to excess. It is my message: the message of one quivering soul whose journey will be far and mysterious. Watch us die. Watch our youth go down and watch the reddened earth. And stay in your homes."

To Natalie he wrote: "Natalie, I am going. I shall not see you until the moment of parting. I could not. But to-morrow morning I shall take the necessary steps and be sent immediately back to my post. Now this is the beginning and the end. If it must be that I lose you, remember always our love. Let it be deathless. And when you plant your gardens, think of Pierre.

"You said to me once, 'You are justified.' I have not forgotten any of your words. You sent me out with a brave heart. You shall send me again. Nor shall I fail you this time, though it is harder. Nothing has changed since that day nearly a year ago. The sound of marching feet still rends the air. The sky is black with smoke. And the invader is on our land. The invader is on our land, but there is more than that. His ruthless planning aims at the heart of our Latin civilization. His hand is lifted for a mortal blow at our immortal spirit. He must be crushed. What is his name, Natalie? You will tell me that when I see you. I know one of his names. It is the name of our present enemy. But when I am gone, when the thousands are gone, will his name have changed? Evil masquerades in many uniforms.

"I see our heroes. They file before me as before an applauding multitude. I see their faces as one face set in grave purpose. I see the flag they carry so proudly. Then they are gone and others come. What language will the future generations speak? Will it be Russian, Japanese, English, or will some undiscovered savage tribe spring forward—

another Prussian Empire? But France, Natalie, France is not like the others. She is not. She is the romance of the past, the poem the young poet writes, the sweetest melody of all, the blue flower reddened by a jealous enemy. Oh, Natalie, men love this thing they call war or there would be no wars. What can we do with raw nature? It must be right. It must be the great profession. And it must be mine. But love me always. Let your vision cover me gently when I am dead, and let my memory lie in your heart like a cradled child. Be happy if you can and your country stays wise. I may never see the gardens of to-morrow, but the flowers will be sweet. I am young, Natalie. But so were they. So were Lucien Nassaud, Brillaud, Robert de Gency and the millions. I love. So did they. There is no difference. The trumpet rings in my ears as imperious, as clear, as Fate. It starts the rhythm. We must carry it on. Adieu, Beloved. If life has been short, it has held you as a golden frame holds the masterpiece."

This letter he folded neatly and placed it with the others. On the top of the package was written, "For Natalie."

Then he went to his bed like a weary child and slept till morning.

## XIV

WHEN Pierre did not come to Natalie for several days, her heart was heavy with nameless fears. The happy time at Vincennes still lingered with her, but since then Pierre had seemed absent-minded, often depressed, and she wondered if she had failed him in any of the fragile ways that make love relations so precarious. Had a hint of her inner doubts escaped her? He loved the Natalie who had carried him victoriously through his own dangerous perplexities. He loved the woman who had stirred him into action, explaining the inexplicable, giving fair names to tragic deeds, prophesying a regenerated world to suit his dreams. But would he love a Natalie who esteemed the death of men a futile sacrifice? She had fed him with pretty fairy tales, kept him hopeful when portents of future wars darkened the horizon, when the reckoning of capital and labor hung fire in every nation, when plans for armaments, always more armaments, found favor with governments, when young boys snatched from their families were to be taught the dangerous game: all in the name of patriotism. The world was arming, and the world chattered of peace. Where was hope in such a gigantic inconsistency?

And there was Pierre dreaming on a volcano, of a tidy world built from the ashes of a consumed generation. He would always dream. All issues were reduced to his country's fate. She had not the courage to face him with grim omens. Neither he nor she would live to see a final peace built on common ideals and established interests of labor. Let him dream therefore while he could, and if he could go through his life and finish it still dreaming, one more soul would have escaped from the terrifying consciousness of reality. But as she looked back over the past her record struck her anew with dismay. She had played the rôle Pierre had given her. She had joined her voice to the voice of romantic women urging their men on to useless heroism. She had gone the easiest way. Perhaps a voice or two raised in loyal warning might have reached a few lost striving souls. Posted through the generations, in the wilderness of popular opinion, have stood from the beginning such prophets, geniuses, and children as their age produced, ready to direct the occasional pilgrim, saying: "We believe this to be the road." Who had listened to them? They have been pronounced too selfish, too wise, too simple. They have pointed to a neglected byroad, leading away from vulgar market places where the trade is for the strong.

Natalie was neither a genius nor a prophet. For Pierre's sake she had chosen to be silent. But her silence had chinks through which keen eyes might look and find the torment of an inquiring mind. She dreaded Pierre's divination. His recent avoidance of her seemed to prove a gathering distrust. She suffered proudly, refusing to call him to her side lest she read in his eyes waning faith.

One day a short letter came: "Beloved, meet me to-morrow afternoon at four in the Luxembourg Gardens by the Carroussel. I want to see you there, in the Gardens where we have been so happy."

Then she knew that all was not well with him, and her love rose fiercely within her to accomplish miracles. Why had he not come to the studio? At a word from her Felix would have left them alone.

It was the end of May. The little balcony looked out upon a flowered garden, full-burdened trees and soft-backed roofs. The season was rolling onwards to the tragic anniversary. She leaned upon the balcony in her old pose of stilled longing. She watched the graceful swallows circling like loosened thoughts across the sky. Why was not Pierre beside her? How hungrily she would have drawn him to her!

Instead Natalie went to the Luxembourg Gardens, obeying Pierre's call.

She went early, unable to contain the uneasiness which increased as the hour advanced. The afternoon was gray and confining, heavy in its sunless shadows. She wandered down the long alleys, where little playing children lit the spaces between the trees, and fountains and flowers glinted in the distances. Old people and lovers sat upon benches and chairs. The hum of life mingled with the subdued disputes of the birds. And, singly or in groups, broken men in uniforms threaded their patient way through romping circles, their faces brightening in answer to the wide-eyed admiration of small worshipers.

But Natalie thought only of one thing: Pierre's coming. She desired passionately his nearness. One glance at his welcoming eyes would quiet her fears. She leaned on the terrace and studied the round clock set in the Luxembourg, whose lazy hands crawled through the moments as if time were of no account.

Then driven again by her restlessness she wandered back to the meeting place, questioning the alleys with growing anguish. Nearly four o'clock, and no Pierre!

The merry-go-round turned to its cracked tune, carrying cargo after cargo of infancy in grotesque mimicries of age. She tried to fix her attention on the small beings circling, their faces depicting undeveloped emotions of pleasure, bewilderment, fear. But they only heightened her unrest. Once lifted on the wooden beasts, they were strapped in place and forced to stay until the ride was over. The machine, set in motion, never paused until it had run its allotted course. If, in quest of amusement or sensation, these mites experienced fear, they were obliged to cope with it, while they went round and round, a spectacle for their complacent elders. Most of them sat stupidly, their pink faces inscrutable, like little old men and women undergoing a social rite; a few smiled foolishly, seeking the maternal eye; others clung to the shiny pole upon which their mount was impaled, and with various expressions of revolt, anguish and distrust were whirled to the end of their journey. Natalie saw life caricatured, its endless contradictions mirrored, in the helpless progeny, and turned away to escape ironic comparisons.

Pierre was coming towards her. He walked slowly, as if each step were a spent moment, never to return. She hastened to him and he stretched out a hand. A familiar little smile was moored to his lips.

"Oh, Pierre!" Her greeting was burdened with relief.

"Beloved!"

That was all. Their arms linked, they paced up an alley, veering into a side path where, among sweet greens and cool statues, shelter was offered. Only a few people lifted a vacant glance at their approach. Natalie found nothing to say. She tuned in with his silence. They chose two chairs, removed from indiscreet intruders, and sat down.

Then only Pierre said, "Let me look at you, Beloved . . . Yes, you are beautiful." Meeting his eyes steadily, she found them weary and mysterious. The youth had gone from them. His face was stamped with vigils and self-questioning.

"You've been ill?" shot from her.

"I'm quite well," he answered gently, still staring at her, as if to mark and register each feature, each line of her body. "Look happy, Beloved. I want to see you look happy once more."

She managed an unconvincing smile, urging, "Something has happened. Tell me what it is."

But, without immediate response, his gaze wandered from her to the stretch of grass at their feet. He seemed to be counting each blade, fixing in his memory leafy vistas beyond, caressing the statues, noting intently a patch of blue that had broken through the gray sky. His silence absorbed the tiniest manifestations of life.

"Oh, what is it, Pierre?" she urged again, with a sharp touch of fear.

Then he turned to her. "I join my regiment to-morrow."

She sprang from her seat with an incoherent cry as if she had been wounded. He motioned her back. "Sit down, Beloved. Be quiet for my sake." She obeyed his note of entreaty.

"I chose to tell you here in the Garden. If your arms had been around me it would have been harder. . . . Yes, I am a coward."

She was still staring at him. Her voice sounded like the frightened treble of a child. "I don't understand!"

"I must go, Natalie. There is no way out."

Then he told her all that had passed, all that had come to him. He told her of his interview with his mother. "I said it was not you, Beloved," he ended on a pleading note. "You mustn't mind her. You see I hoped . . . everything could be arranged. But it was not possible. My going makes her understand you. She believes me now when I say that you give me strength to do my duty. She believes that your love has kept me steady and that it will again. . . . Won't it?" His rising inflection was lost.

A deep silence fell between them through which Natalie groped among shattered things, striving to still the tumult in her being. It would do no good to scream or cry. The moment must be met and conquered. A crippled soldier passed. A child in pink passed, throwing and catching a red ball. A young woman carrying a book passed. Natalie noted them mechanically. Life went on. Only they two had stopped, as if ordinary movements no longer concerned them.

It seemed a long time before she said, "You are *not* going back!" His accent of finality had stunned her. She could have fought at once an energetic mood, but his gentleness was more implacable than argument.

He began to speak as he had done once before at the parting, when there seemed so little time to say all that was in his heart.

"Beloved, life is not just a question of living and loving. We know that. We have gone through this before. There is one thing you must believe: I am strong now, and your gift of faith is my talisman . . . not easily lost. I could not see you, dear, before I had made up my mind what I must do. You would have thought me a weakling, if I had come crying for help at such a time. Now you can be proud of me. This is my duty . . ."

"Your duty?" escaped from her.

"Yes, Natalie!" His face grew animated as he went on. The old fires burned in his eyes. "The world must be delivered. France must be delivered—and do I not belong to the world and to France? The value of a man to-day lies in his endurance less than in his brain. I can endure with the others. Natalie, look at me. Am I not strong? What are my dreams worth? They cannot defeat an enemy. They cannot save a life. My talent is for building, but I am like a man who tries to build a beautiful cathedral on a land that is littered with wreckage. How can I build . . . and where? So there is nothing for me to do but to go out with the other men and clear up the land." He smiled wanly. "Beloved, you are wiser than I. You will inherit my dreams. You will see that they are fulfilled. I have stood aside from men, as dreamers do, loving them in my fashion. But they are sociable animals, even in war. They die together. That is rather fine, isn't it?"

"It would be better if they lived together!" she interrupted quickly.

He shook his head. "They can't . . . now. But it will come. I must think that. Ah, if they could only live as they die—one heart, one mind, one body on the battlefield in superb obedience to fate—what union there could be on earth!" He paused as if the thought had mastered him, inviting Natalie mutely to join him in his dream. But she stayed still and limp.

Pierre touched her with his hand. "Natalie, are you not content?"

"You *must* not go," she said as if it were a lesson.

He argued like a little child, drawing closer to her. "But why?"

With an effort she answered, "You've been wounded once. That's enough."

"I thought so," he said sadly. "But it is not enough."

"They will need you . . . after the war."

"When will that be?"

"You're not well yet."

He lifted his arm. "I can hold a gun."

"You're not strong," she insisted. Her throat had tightened. She struggled to pronounce words distinctly.

"You make it hard, Beloved."

"I need you here."

A fragrance of flowers drifted across their path, fanned by the air, and floated by intangibly. They were caught in a spectrum of sweetness mingling their breath and eyes. And so they sat through an instant of yearning.

Then, "You need me?" he whispered. His eyes were suddenly moist.

She nodded. "I have grown to need you, Pierre. Can you read a woman's heart? Can you measure her desire?" She could not bear to look at his eyes. The secret she carried rankled in her heart, embittering her voice. "You've done this because of your family, haven't you?"

"No."

"They don't want me," she went on in rising passion. "Of course they wouldn't. But need they send you away on account of it? I'd rather give you up," she said wildly. Already she felt the space widening between them. His image grew fainter as if he were being carried away on a resistless tide. She cried out at the pain in his face. "No, Pierre! Forgive me!"

He said rapidly. "It isn't my family . . . it isn't. They have voiced what is in us all to-day. And I have heard your voice with theirs. Can you deny it? Beloved, I will open my heart to you. You shall look deep as you did that day. Then you will say again, 'You are justified.' Listen! . . . I don't want to kill any more to-day than I did yesterday. The thought is horrible to me. . . . You say I am not strong. My body is well. Only my spirit is sick. But you can cure me . . ."

"Again?"

"Again . . . always! I have questioned once more. You see I hide nothing from you. I have tried once more to understand the outcome of this great sacrifice, before . . . I go. I find you everywhere in the answer. I see you pointing ahead."

"Ahead?" she echoed drearily.

He looked troubled. "I don't understand you, Beloved. I counted on your magnificent faith. You have thought as I do that the duel is between good and evil. Why has the world come suddenly upon this crisis, if it were not necessary to the world's development?" He looked at her with the mystic expectancy she recognized. "I am a thinking atom attached to the mass, associating myself with the deeds of men, because man represents life and I am man. Is not that enough? When we have driven out the enemy we may think of building . . . not before."

"Those who are left to think!" slipped from her. Other words trembled on the verge of utterance. She held them back. She was afraid now of what she might say.

"There will always be men left," cried Pierre, "while there are women such as you to bear them! And the glory of dying for a cause is more than life." But his voice missed the triumphant ring of conviction.

She stared at him a moment and then said slowly: "You will go? Nothing can stop you?"

"Don't you see, it's the only way?" was his answer.

Then something rose up in her that was like rage. The wasted youth of nations, the force that drove them to destruction, her own helplessness, and the idea that Pierre again without hate in his heart was adding his life to the others, goaded her beyond control. He should go then, but not like the rest, stuffed with illusions and catchwords of honor and glory. He should go knowing the price, judging for himself the worth of death as she had measured it. The lie within her burst its bounds, but as she started to speak she saw by his altered face that she was about to deal a mortal blow.

"You are weak," she said. "You know deep in your heart that you go because you are afraid not to go. You were never meant to hold a gun. You know that this nonsense about saving civilization is the supreme lie of an uncivilized world. For there is no civilization to save: there are the brains which might have made it a reality served up as targets. War is not waged for sentiment. You may think it is. Frenchmen may think it is. The sentimentalists are always the easiest victims. It has been so this time."

"Natalie . . ." he gasped.

She held him with her eyes, watching the searing words mark him indelibly. "Let us for once face such truth as there is! Who am I to know the truth? I can only voice what has grown within me, planted by the first and last lie I shall ever tell you."

"Oh, Natalie!"

She continued. "I told you that you were justified. I did not think so. For I don't believe that any man of any nation is justified. If their madness left them, if by a miracle the killing stopped to-day . . . with no results to show and the map unchanged . . . few men would feel proud of the part they played, and those who did feel proud, I tell you, are farther from civilization and Christianity than the men of the Stone Ages. For these modern men have pretended to belong to progress. . . . Remember I don't count. My thought is an outcast. I cannot change human nature, though I uncover it. Now this is what I . . . one woman . . . believe: that those women, who in Germany, England, France, Russia, America and all the other nations gave their voice freely to this or any war, unconsciously abetting schemes of governments and capitalists, are fools and criminals. They should have foreseen results. Men are ruled mainly by their primal instincts. But they, the women, should have known that if races are to evolve into a higher state it must be through finer, cleverer methods than war. Yes, I said clever! War is a stupid return for education. And I, Natalie, fell into the sin of other women. I sent you off with lies, lies, lies to suit your uniform. I will not send you the second time!"

Pierre stared at her. But nothing now could stop her.

"The lust of conquest began with your enemy. Yet blind fools cooped in the trenches repeat like parrots the words given them, 'We didn't want war. It isn't our fault.' And you, *their* enemy, are saying the same words. You didn't want war either. It isn't your fault. Then in God's name whose fault is it? Who wanted war? Yet there is war, and war breeds war. When your country is freed, don't forget, Pierre, it will only be one among many. And it will have to face larger issues than attacked land. It will have to face death and debt. You hope for indemnities. Can a questionable sum cover the incalculable disaster? Will that indemnity be paid to the government or to the people? Will it be invested in other armies? Ah, Pierre, where will the builders and the artisans and the men of brains be then? The schemers will be left. They are prudent. But when maimed men take off their uniforms they will become so many useless factors of society. You can't set them all to weaving rugs and tuning pianos. You, who fight, believe that with Prussia crushed you will have no other menace to contend with. You hope that by ruining one country you can go back to your homes in peace. But if Germany is crippled for a space of time which will not count in the world's future history, she is simply one rival temporarily out of the field. Oh, Pierre, evil cannot die. It is part of us. You would have to suppress humanity to rid us of evil. Pierre, your death will not affect the world."

She heard him give a little sound as if he were trying to breathe, but she swept on.

"Defend your country if you will, because it is attacked! But don't believe that natural instinct of yours which is primitive has anything to do with great humanitarian crusades. Those are bloodless. We have yet to see them. You deal with local danger. That is all. The peoples to-day are fighting to enrich further capitalists and munition makers. That's what it comes to. *They* are your real enemies. But you do not attack them. They are the disease of so-called civilization. And they prosper." She laughed mirthlessly. "Pacific countries are coining fortunes selling shells to whoever will buy. Do you suppose they sell such death because they believe in honor, glory, patriotism? Do you suppose the manufacturers have the interests of humanity at heart? Oh, my dear, they are quite right to trade on human folly. But finding such advantage in it, presently they will be urging their own people to find an enemy and turn their munition factories into home industries. Internationalism exists. Do you know where? Among bankers and politicians. They are the ones who with paid scientists are forging a huge syndicate to wield the world and bleed it dry. You die to satisfy them, Pierre. Is it worth while?"

"Natalie . . . stop," he whispered. "What are you saying?"

"Saying what I, one woman, believe. And I'll tell you more. Internationalism is a remedy. But it will only come through free mingling of the races, interbreeding, coöperative industries and disarmament. It won't come with excessive taxes and wars. It won't come while governments deal in secret treaties and trickery. It won't come while men are willing to die when they are told to."

"You are killing me," she heard him say.

"Pierre, my own Pierre, is it not better than lying to you? I have told you long enough what you wanted to hear. Now you must listen to me, the Natalie you have never known."

Pierre rose and stood before her swaying, his white face and tragic eyes fixed upon her. "It's too late." Then the wail mounted that was to haunt her forever after. "But, oh, Beloved, why did you tell me these terrible things?"

She rose also and faced him, as if the supreme moment of parting had come. A burden had gone from her heart. She felt emptied of life and love. "I had to." An immense weariness weighed down her body. She was old.

"There is nothing more then?" he murmured.

"Nothing." Her eyes wandered to the grass which in the thickening twilight had turned to an opaque mass of dull green. The trees threw shadows across their path.

"Well, well, it's all over," she said as if she were speaking to herself. "You'll have to go then. My love can't save you. . . . The world will have to learn," she added in a dazed voice.

"All this time I thought . . ." he muttered. "All this time I thought. . . . Well, there is nothing to be done about it."

"Nothing."

Their eyes met in fathomless yearning.

"I can't mend the world," she said.

"No one can. . . . Oh, Natalie!" the cry broke out and touched her. The clock struck an hour. They counted the final notes.

"I must go now," he said pitifully as if he were waking from a dream. "I must go."

"Yes . . . go quickly. Kiss me, Pierre . . . kiss me."

He kissed her. Those who passed and saw the parting smiled affectionately upon this idyl between a soldier and a girl.

"Adieu!"

"Adieu."

One more look that linked and parted them forever and he was gone, a bright spot among the trees, vanishing far down an alley.

She sank into the chair staring vacantly ahead of her. Then her loss struck her. A cold pain entered her heart like steel. Driven by it she ran down the alley after him.

"Pierre, I lied! . . . Pierre, nothing is true! . . . Pierre, you are justified!" she tried to call. But he had gone his way. And she was left alone in the darkening garden to find her way through the gates. There was nothing to be done. She had spoken.

## XV

OLD Jean Bourdon and the women dressed in black sat at the round table eating. They ate like machines opening and shutting their mouths. And in the big dining room where the furniture seemed to have sprouted from the floor in massive familiar shapes, these women of several generations fitted into the space like plants that have grown in the same climate for years. The air was charged with the heat of midday.

Jean Bourdon said once, "A year ago we were all here." His dulled eyes rested on three vacant chairs.

"Henri may be back on leave in a few months," murmured Madame Bourdon. Her rigid face had forgotten how to smile. She spoke without interest.

"Henri . . . yes."

Louise Bourdon looked up with a spark of animation. "He hasn't written lately."

Madame Bourdon said with an effort, "Not since Pierre's death," and lowered her face.

Grandmother Bourdon wagged her head and cackled, "Pierre is a brave boy . . . a good soldier." She peered around the table with misty eyes. Her palsied hand reached out for the bread.

"He died as a Frenchman should," Jean Bourdon remarked heavily, and pushed his plate away as if he would never eat again.

"He did his duty," his mother said.

Then Lorraine rose passionately. "I can't bear it . . . I can't bear it!" she sobbed and swayed out of the room.

"Poor Lorraine!" sighed Germaine.

And they sat on, opening and shutting their mouths, avoiding one another's eyes. The room was weighted with memories of vanished youth.

Natalie, in black, stood on the little balcony, holding the letters Pierre had left for her. She stood there without moving.

The roofs were very old. They seemed to have lived a long while and grown wise and mellow. Their quaint pattern was a seal of the city set in the sky. Far away on its peak the Sacré-Cœur hovered like a cloud. The bells of Saint-Germain were ringing. They rang as if they would never stop, as if their voice must reach the ends of the earth awakening sleepers. They told men there was no way of escaping Fate. They told women there was no use in weeping. The life of the city, hidden among the roofs, drifted upwards, a medley of interwoven discords. And below in the shadowless old courtyard a little boy was playing at war. He was a brave General at the head of his troops. The courtyard was peopled with enemies. Battles were raging. . . .

These words of Pierre's came to Natalie: "I don't want to kill. I don't want to throw away any of the gifts civilization has given to me, unless in offering my life I am benefiting future humanity. If I had been let alone, I would have created, built, justified my place in a constructive society. Or else I should have been a soldier from the beginning . . . an automaton with a gun."

He had said, "There must be a deep significance in our sacrifice. . . . What am I? My bayonet is a blade of grass, my mind a seed in the field. But if by adding my life to the millions I can assist a natural terrific manifestation of good, I must consider myself enrolled in an eternal cause . . ."

Then she read again his last words. "Let your vision cover me gently when I am dead, and let my memory lie in your heart like a cradled child. Be happy if you can and your country stays wise. . . . The trumpet rings in my ears as imperious, as clear, as Fate. It starts the rhythm. We must carry it on. Adieu, Beloved . . ."

He had gone the way of the youthful millions and the world was none the better for it. And she was alone with a grave in her heart.

She stretched out her arms to the city.

But the city could not give her what it had taken, nor could men undo what they had done.

**THE END**

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